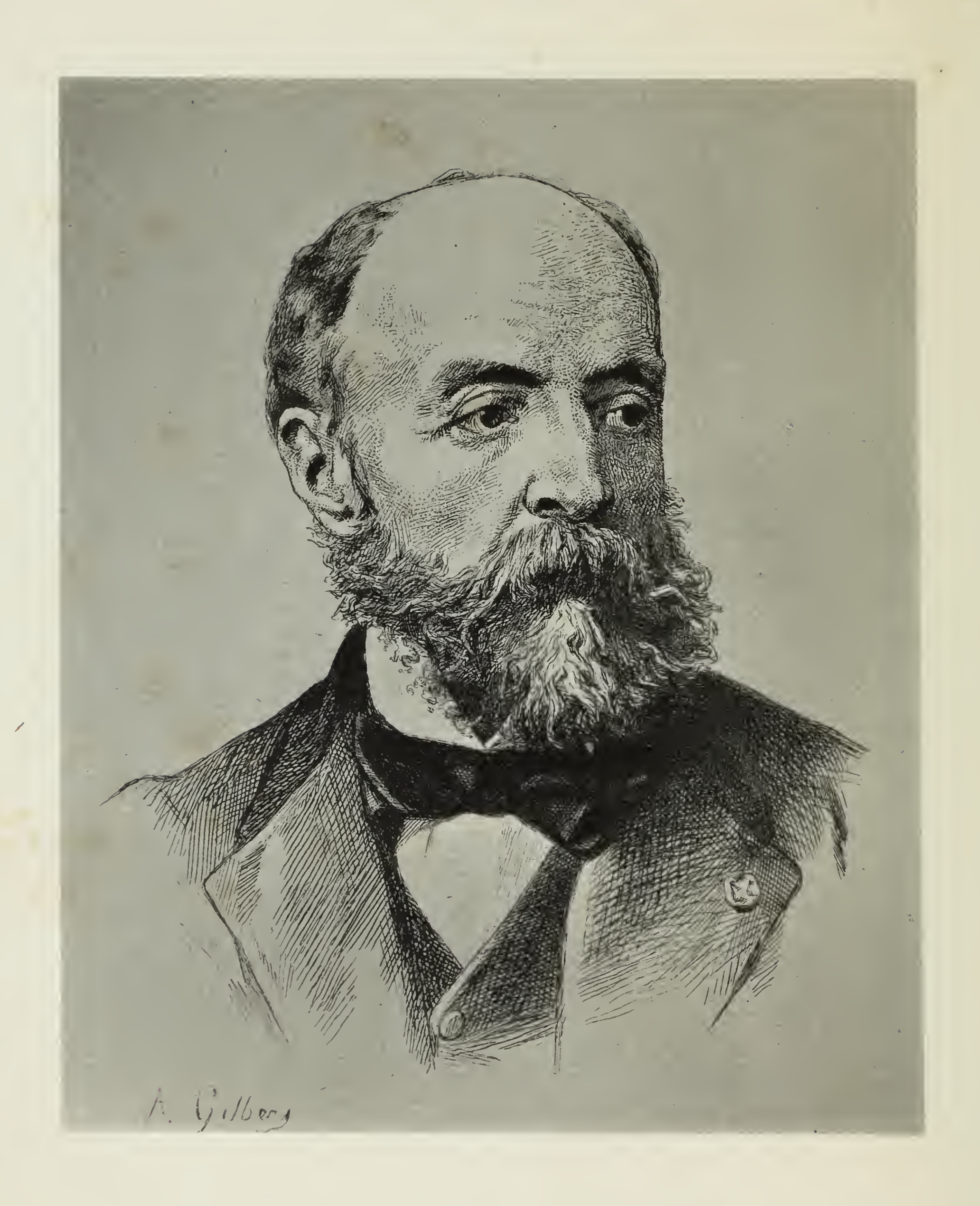
EUGÈNE FROMENTIN

PAINTER AND WRITER



LOUIS GONSE



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BY

M. LOUIS GONSE

EDITOR OF THE GAZETTE DES BEAUX ARTS

TRANSLATED BY

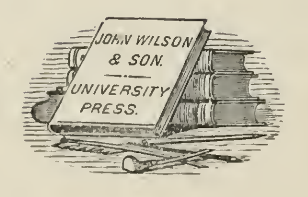
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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE volume we publish upon Fromentin is a collection of articles that appeared in the "Gazette des Beaux-Arts." In passing from the Review to the book these articles have been subject to much retouching and to important corrections. We have tried to make of them a more homogeneous whole. We do not know whether we have succeeded, but we may be permitted to emphasize the peculiar interest of this edition. We have added to our work certain unpublished fragments by Fromentin, and many new engravings.

We have written this study with a sort of sympathetic enthusiasm for the man and his work, having been able to appreciate the high qualities of the one in his private relations, and to follow the stages of the other in the very countries he has revealed to us. But it has been also our good fortune to be allowed to let Fromentin himself speak. We have given the largest space to his unpublished work.

It was the best way of bringing again to life this exquisite soul and to attract the curiosity of the reader. The letters to George Sand, to MM. Busson and Humbert, the fragments of the Holland and Belgium Note-books, the "Critic's Programme" and the "Ile de Ré," are excellent specimens of Fromentin.

L. G.

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EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

PAINTER AND WRITER.

I.

BIOGRAPHY.



I SEEM still to see Eugène Fromentin in his large and elegant studio in the Place Pigalle, with that atmosphere around him of slightly haughty politeness that he knew so well how to employ to keep bores at a distance, though he was ready and willing to expand with people whom he liked. I see him with his dress always correct and careful, like that of a man of the world. I hear his conversation, so individual and clear, overflowing with subtle or lofty ideas, shrewd perception, and penetrating observation. Thus he will ever be remembered and heard by those who knew him

in the last days of his life. It seems to me but yesterday; I cannot believe that four years have already elapsed since death extinguished that brilliant flame. I might indeed be reproached with having waited all this time to trace the portrait of Fromentin, by sketching his biography and studying in the works of his pen or brush the peculiar evidences of his talent; for this delay is almost wilful. I had to collect and to set in order numerous papers, letters, and various writings which had been confided to me by his family and certain of his friends. Wishing to try to express a full and broad judgment, I have not been in haste. Fromentin is one of those whose person and works will always be present with us. He belongs to that class of rare minds whose memory does not grow old, and who have nothing to fear from the morrow.

I will sketch his biography in a few brief features, that I may not have to occupy myself further with it. I say features, because the life of Fromentin, which was simple and without great events, has remained intimately connected with his work. Contrary to what one might suppose, he loved a quiet life. He did not care for journeys in themselves: he loved them for his art, or for the aliment that they afforded to his studies; he would willingly have limited himself to a single change of place. This he expresses admirably in the first letters of "A Year in the Sahel." Let me quote the lines: "You must let those who believe me a traveller suppose that I am on a journey, and you must tell them I am gone away. If they ask where, you can answer that I am in Africa; it is a magic word which lends itself to conjecture, and which sets the lovers of discovery dreaming. To

you I can with humility tell the real fact, — this country pleases me, it suffices for me, and for the present I shall go no farther than Mustapha in Algeria, that is, about two paces from the beach where the boat set me ashore. I want to try being at home in this foreign land, where until now I have only been a passenger, stopping at inns, in caravansaries, or under a tent; forever changing, now my dwelling, and again my bivouac; ever encamping, arriving, and departing, with all the movableness of a provisional state, like a pilgrim. This time I have come to live, and inhabit the land. According to my opinion, it is the best way to know much while seeing little; to see thoroughly by seeing often; to travel, certainly, but like one who is present at a spectacle, where the changing pictures renew themselves around a fixed point of sight, and an immovable existence." Let us go on: the whole passage is charming. "Of what use is it to multiply memories, accumulate facts, run after undescribed curiosities, embarrass one's self with names, guide-books, lists? The outer world is like a dictionary; it is a book full of repetitions and synonyms, with many words equivalent to the same idea. Ideas are simple, formulas numerous; it is ours to choose and sum up. As to celebrated places, I compare them to rare modes of expression, a useless luxury which human language can spare without losing anything. In other days I have travelled two hundred leagues to live a month, which will last forever, in a nameless, almost unknown date forest,[1] and I have passed within two hours' gallop of the Numidian tomb of Syphax without turning aside. Everything is in everything. Why should not

[1] Zaatcha near Biskra.

all the essentials of the whole Algerian country be contained in the little space framed by my window? and can I not hope to see the Arabian people defile before my eyes along this highway, or in the fields which bound my garden?" Yes, Fromentin passionately loved his home, the life of the family and fireside, the life which demands a calm, regular, constant, eager labor; that is to say, he loved his art above everything, giving himself to it with most singular conscientiousness, entirely and always. Except his sojourns in Algeria, — which was, as he says, his land of adoption, — a short stay at Saint Raphael, one trip to Venice, and another into Holland, his existence passed between his studio in Paris and the one at St. Maurice. His life is in his work, and it consumed itself in the fever of a labor too often excessive, and of an incessant production. In what follows, I shall scarcely have to do more than repeat under this head what I have written in the notice in the catalogue of his posthumous exhibition, having then said about all that I wished to say.

Eugène Fromentin was born at La Rochelle, October 24, 1820, and not in December, as the dictionary of M. Vapereau erroneously states. It was in this town that he received his education, after having passed the best period of his childhood in a little village in the neighborhood called St. Maurice, where his family owned an important property, half farm, half country-seat. Eugène Fromentin was and remained a thorough Rochelais. He always lived in heart and thought in his dear town, which by its aspect, by that of its surroundings, even by its commercial and religious traditions, often also by the color of its gray sky, is a pseudo-Dutch city. In respect to

the material quality of his painting, is not Fromentin in fact something of a Hollander, a relative of Wynants and Wouverman? If the writer in him remains exclusively French, has not the painter a secret tenderness for the art of Holland? Even in Algiers, and in some of his most delicate works, does he not willingly see the sun through the light fogs of his native country?

His collegiate course was very brilliant; he early manifested rare literary aptitude. His grandfather was a barrister in the Parliament; his father, a physician of talent, was the head of a great establishment for the insane at La Rochelle. Although the latter occupied himself with painting, having formerly attended, during his student life in Paris, Bertin's studio, and frequented as an amateur those of Gros and Gérard, he was at bottom a positive man, of a self-controlled nature, and something of a Philistine. Fromentin's mother had an uncommon mind: she was very pious, with a serious and thoughtful piety which did not exclude tolerance of ideas, and she possessed a healthy liberty of judgment. His father, destining him for the magistracy, sent him to Paris to study law. This was in the early days of 1839, when young Fromentin was hardly nineteen. On his arrival he affiliated with two of his countrymen, Benjamin Fillon and Émile Beltremieux, a student of medicine, and, a little later, with Paul Bataillard, who became his favorite comrade during the whole period which preceded his first journey to Algiers. With them he lived in the most cordial intimacy, occupying his leisure almost exclusively with literature, especially poetry. I know from certain notes furnished me by M. Fillon that he even then dreamed of a literary

future. He seemed very positive that his innate aptitude and his dearest aspirations were originally for the art of writing. So, as soon as he was settled in Paris, he began to frequent the public lectures on literature and history much more assiduously than the museums.

After being presented to Michelet, to Quinet, to Sainte-Beuve, he became one of the frequenters of their soirées. He wrote at this epoch many verses, more good ones than bad, and quite a number that were very pretty. We will remark in passing that it was upon the poetical anvil that he forged little by little the fine prose of his "Sahara." In a literary sense, poetry was his strongest instrument of education. Moreover, he had before made several essays in the writer's trade. His first attempts are dated 1837. He sometimes deposited, not without trembling, small fragments of verse in the box of a newspaper at La Rochelle which was then printed by a man named Maréchal. He used to relate the juvenile emotions of this beginning, the anguish with which he awaited the next day's paper in which his bit of poetry was to appear, if it were judged worthy of publication. The same newspaper produced, from 1837 to 1839, a number of his other youthful productions. The one he loved the best had for its title "The Dream of Aufredi." It was borrowed from the annals of La Rochelle at the beginning of the thirteenth century. But he did not let it appear, because at the last moment he perceived that many of his lines had been altered without his having been informed of the change. He had still among his student's baggage a poem and two or three dramatic sketches.



SCENE FROM "CHATTERTON" (1841).

Nothing at this time seemed to draw him toward the career of a painter. His first attempts as a designer are a little more tardy. It was only towards the end of 1840 that his taste for painting awakened, under the influence (a quite curious detail) of Michel Carré, one of his comrades, who then was using the palette, and partly under that of his father. He drew at first with no definite aim. The oldest of these youthful scratchings which have come down to us is, I believe, the one we reproduce here. I give it as a curiosity. It belonged to his friend Fillon. It was made April 2, 1841, on the morrow of a performance of "Chatterton," by Alfred de Vigny, at the Théâtre Français. As can be seen, it does not suggest a future talent.

In the botanical studies which he made in the vicinity of Paris with Beltremieux, he tried to draw little sketches from nature. These are the stammerings of a landscape painter. From 1841 date also two etchings, that are quite commonplace; two portraits, — one of Dubois, a law student, who died a notary at La Rochelle (half length, sitting, almost full face); another of Émile Beltremieux (a profile head). He had also tried to reproduce by the same method the features of Edgar Quinet, and his own, (full face, head leaning on his right hand). Not having succeeded in this last plate in rendering the inexpressible restlessness in his look, otherwise very firm, he destroyed the plate, and distributed no proofs from it among his friends. 1842 brought also nothing decisive in his artistic vocation. The Louvre, however, began to attract him. There he took long and frequent promenades. His first sentiments concerning the masters

are quite curious to note. His love for the quality of correct and delicate execution here begins to break forth. Fromentin — and this is a thing worthy of notice — never judged painting as a literary man. In the future he will rather be reproached for judging it rather too much as a painter. The Italian school leaves him almost indifferent to it. Leonardo alone arrests him at times, but causes him less admiration than disturbance. Salvator interests him. As to Titian's portraits, he has for them a mute worship. In the French school, he esteems Chardin above all. Le Sueur, whose fine painting he had admired when he was quite young, attracts his attention. But already he is enthusiastic for the Dutch school, especially for the landscape painters. Wynants's *Ford*, with figures by Berchem, Ruysdael's *Burst of Sunshine*, and his *Dike Lashed by the Sea*, fascinate him. As he loved to repeat, before these pictures he felt happy. Sometimes he is carried away by a passion for Rubens, but it is only a flash. The *Kermesse* gives him a kind of vertigo. Vandyck's fine portraits please his aristocratic nature better, though he is sometimes disturbed by their theatrical composition; while he looks at the painter, he is always thinking of the surprising etcher. In spite of his leanings towards Goethe and Schiller, the Germans — even Albert Dürer, whom he can judge of only in prints — find him absolutely rebellious. Rembrandt is incomprehensible to him, except in his etched landscapes. Among the moderns, Delacroix is at first his passion. He reproaches Ingres with being an imitator of Raphael, whom Fromentin esteemed only moderately, for he knew him but little. However, he acknowledges, on seeing a drawing by Ingres,

that he is a *sculptor* of the first rank. In music, he knows Mozart and Beethoven only by reputation; he loves Bellini, Donizetti, and the whole sensuous school of Rossini.

In 1843 he had finished his licentiate, and begun his practice. He inhabited then, with Paul Bataillard, a little bachelor's apartment in the Rue Jacob. He had just entered the law office of Maître Denormandie. At this moment the fever which was to decide his whole life declared itself. His taste for painting carried the day. A common friend was induced to negotiate the matter with his father, and the latter, after quite a vigorous resistance, yielded, but wished to choose himself the studio in which his son should begin. The young lawyer was accordingly admitted to that of the landscape painter Rémond, who was the descendant of the Michallons, Bidaults, and Bertins, and then represented the academic school of landscape. He did not remain there long, and Rémond's teaching seems to have left with him no marked traces. About a year after, he was admitted into Cabat's studio, who was and remained his true master, if a master can be assigned to an artist so passionately in love with nature as Fromentin. The great distinction of Cabat's mind and talent answers to his intimate tendencies, and doubtless exercised from the beginning a favorable influence in the development of his manner.

At this time began the second period of his existence. The painter and writer burst, almost at the same time, the shell of their chrysalis, to pursue together, and without interfering with each other, their double vocation. This was his period of generous ardor, of active and frequent production, the period of his journeys and sojourns in

Algiers. Paris saw him only at intervals; he was oftener at La Rochelle. He occupied in turn several studios, — in the Rue Neuve-Bréda, the Rue de Laval, the Rue du Cherche-Midi, — until the time when he established himself permanently in his little hotel in the Place Pigalle, at the angle of the Boulevard de Clichy, behind the Avenue Frochot. This small hotel, of modest appearance, bears the number 1. It was in perfect accord with the tastes of its occupant. The studio was arranged with a severe elegance which struck one immediately, but it was an unstudied effect. Fromentin desired above all that it should be exquisitely clean and in perfect order. To tell the truth, it was more a drawing-room than a studio. A great chimney-piece of old oak occupied one end of it, inviting to social converse. There were few, almost no pictures. Fromentin had a sort of modesty in his labor. He never allowed his studies to be examined. The picture in process of execution occupied, almost alone, in a good light, the centre of the studio. In this carefully chosen surrounding the master's face took on an exquisite delicacy.

About the time of his entrance into the studio of Cabat, then in the Rue Richepance, Fromentin made a friend of M. Armand Du Mesnil, who became later his uncle by marriage, and who remained to the end his most faithful and intimate friend. In 1846 he took his first journey into Algeria with him. Decamps and Marilhat had already put him on the scent of the East, especially Marilhat by his magnificent exhibition in 1844. His first journey, to tell the truth, was only a very hurried trip to Algiers and to Blidah, where the sister of a common friend was married; but it had a decided effect. Fro-

mentin brought home some pencil sketches and some studies in color. The charm of that incomparable scenery had conquered him, leaving him in a maze of enthusiasm. He belonged henceforth to Africa. To the very end his soul remained turned toward the country of the sun.

He had found his path: he walked in it with rapid step. From that time forth, his artist life was written in the two volumes of the "Sahara" and the "Sahel," and especially in the Catalogues of the Salon, which mark the luminous stages of his success. He made his début there in 1847 with three pictures: *A Farm in the Neighborhood of La Rochelle*, in Cabat's manner; *A Mosque near Algiers;* and *A View taken in the Gorges of Chiffa*, — which immediately attracted attention to him. Of these three pictures, the *Farm in the Neighborhood of La Rochelle*, which belongs to M. Paul Bataillard, is the oldest. It may be considered the most characteristic of his first manner, before the revelation of Marilhat. In 1848 he made his second journey to Algeria, this time with Auguste Salzmann. He went as far eastward as Constantine and Biskra, and passed the month of February in the oasis of Zaatcha. The relation of this excursion occupies the first pages of his "Summer in the Sahara." Then, in 1849, he exhibited five Algerian pictures, and obtained a second medal; in 1850, eleven pictures, souvenirs of his journey to Biskra. In 1852–53, immediately after his marriage, he returned to his beloved Africa, stopping at first at St. Raphael, near Nice. He established himself with Madame Fromentin, at Mustapha, in Algiers afterwards at Blidah. Between times he made alone, in the middle of

summer, a trip southward to El Aghouat. He remained nearly two months in this oasis, which left with him an ineffaceable remembrance. Fromentin returned to France wholly emancipated. From this journey date the two volumes entitled, "A Summer in the Sahara," and "A Year in the Sahel," which appeared first, — one in the "Revue de Paris" (1856), the other in the "Revue des Deux Mondes" (1858). He brought back finally that mass of painted and drawn studies of which a large number were seen at his sale, and which were to be the fruitful aliment of his labors. Of that last and magnificent vision of a land which he was never to see again, his eye preserved an image ever clear and vibrating, his mind brought away its essential lines.

After this his contributions to the Salon succeeded each other without intermission, for Fromentin remained one of the faithful to this kind of exhibition. We find him there in 1853 with *A Moorish Burial;* in 1857, with seven canvases, among which was the charming picture of *Arabs Hunting with the Falcon*, and *Halt of Merchants before El Aghouat;* in 1859, with five pictures, — *Negro Mountebanks*, *A Street in El Aghouat*, the *Edge of an Oasis during a Sirocco*, *Souvenir of Algeria*, and the *Audience at a Caliphate.* This year, 1859, should be marked with a white cross. All the pictures exhibited by him were of the finest value; they sparkled in the exhibition like groups of precious stones; and the artist's friends well remember the success that he attained with the most fastidious judges. Fromentin received a first medal at the close of this Salon, and also a decoration.



SMALA OF SI-AHMED-BEL-HADJ (BISKRA, March 11, 1848).

Fac-simile of a chalk drawing by Eugène Fromentin.

In 1861 he exhibited the *Couriers from the Country of the Ouled-Nayls,* now in the Luxembourg; in 1863, *Falcon Hunting,* or rather *The Quarry,* also in the Museum of the Luxembourg, one of the most finished and luminously clear of all his works; in 1864, the *Wind-storm in the Plains of Alfa;* in 1865, *Heron Hunting,* the most marvellous work of all; in 1866, *Nomadic Tribe on a Journey;* in 1867, the *Women of the Ouled-Nayls,* and some of his most charming pictures at the Exposition, which brought him a first medal; in 1868, the picture of the *Centaurs;* in 1869, the *Fantasia;* in 1872, the two great views of Venice, the *Grand Canal* and the *Mole,* which display such sound truth of observation; in 1874, the *Ravine;* and, finally, in 1876, the *Nile,* and the *Souvenir of Esneh.* The Salons of 1872 and 1876 recall the two rapid journeys that he made, — one to Venice, with the painter Busson, his friend; the other to Cairo and Egypt, with the commission invited by the Viceroy and appointed to represent France at the inauguration of the Suez Canal. From the journey to Egypt he brought back quite a voluminous book of notes taken from hasty impressions. These notes, which have been confided to me by his family, possess a very lively interest, from their justice and sincerity of observation. I will return to them later. He had been named officer of the Legion of Honor in 1869. Let us add that he was almost constantly a member of the jury on paintings at the exhibitions, and had there a very marked authority.

Fromentin was not a member of the Institute! But this will not appear a very great disgrace, when we remember that Delacroix was one with great difficulty, and very late; that neither Corot, nor

Decamps, nor Millet, nor Daubigny, nor even the greatest of landscape painters, past, present, and future, Theodore Rousseau, were judged worthy to belong to it. One day, however, he bethought him of his literary claims. In 1876, after a tour which he made in the Netherlands, having given the last touches to his famous and astonishing volume, the "Old Masters of Belgium and Holland," to which were added the "Sahara," the "Sahel," and the novel "Domiique," published in 1862 in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," he presented himself to the French Academy. By a rare occurrence he received fourteen votes on the first ballot. He who was a painter was about to have the singular honor of entering that noble company by the literary door, when death suddenly surprised him.

I do not need to recall the emotion produced by this unexpected death. It was profound for the public, cruel for his friends, truly painful for all those — and they were numerous — whom this exquisite nature had touched by its sympathetic grace. The posthumous exhibition at the École des Beaux-Arts permitted us to measure this new void in contemporary art. France has lost an enchanting artist and a writer of the first rank; Algeria has witnessed the disappearance of her painter, her poet, we might even say her inventor, for in 1846 people cared very little for that admirable country. Fromentin, alas! died in the vigor of his age, at fifty-six, in the full maturity of a talent whose autumn would doubtless have reserved for us more than one surprise and teaching.

He had left Paris in the evening of Sunday, August 17, to pass his vacation at Saint Maurice, according to his custom. Although

nothing foreshadowed so near an end, he was visibly weary; his constitution was undermined by the inward fever of his soul, and by continual and excessive tension in his work. About the 20th a little pimple came upon his lip, which at first occasioned him no anxiety, but afterwards assumed the form of a malignant anthrax, and brought on the first violent attack of fever on the 24th, followed by a relative calm. On the 26th, during the evening, a second attack of unusual violence consumed the remainder of his strength. He passed gently away the following morning at nine o'clock, like a lamp deprived of oil, his mind vaguely soothed by a last thought of his art, and with the consolation of dying surrounded by all whom he loved.

Before the lineaments of this very marked figure have faded from my memory, I desire to perpetuate its principal features. A passage from a letter of George Sand to M. Jules Claretie will give a sketch of them. "Eugène Fromentin is small and delicately constituted. His face is startlingly expressive; his eyes magnificent. His conversation, like his painting and writing, is brilliant and strong, solid, pregnant, and full of color. One could listen to him forever. He is regarded with an esteem which is highly merited; for his life, like his mind, is a model of delicacy, taste, perseverance, and distinction. He has steady and devoted friends, and a charming family. Happy they who can live in intimate association with this man, who is exquisite in every way! This can be affirmed in all security of conscience and judgment."

These two great artists in style esteemed and cared for each other reciprocally. Fromentin was one of Madame Sand's intimate

friends; and later in this book will be found the delicately chiselled letters he addressed to her at Nohant. The woman judged the man correctly. The portrait she has traced is only an indication, but one of incisive exactness. It aims at general characteristics, — the never-to-be-forgotten fire of his glance, the charm of his conversation. The whole exterior Fromentin lies in those two facts.

His figure, which was very straight, was below the medium height; his constitution remained frail. He had always been thin, and his leanness was still more marked in his latter years. His whole person was of sovereign distinction in its attraction; his hand was fine, nervous, full of life, and spirited in movement. Fromentin was dark. His head, which concentrated the attention of every one who spoke to him for the first time, was of a very remarkable character. His beard — I am speaking of the time when I knew him — was thin and grizzled, like that of an ascetic; his brow, wholly bald, was rather high than wide; his nose, aquiline and small; his eyes, large and slightly dilated, were very black and brilliant, yet of velvety softness, — and these questioning eyes, of which the lustre and expression were at times marvellous, added to the ascetic character of the face. His glance was admirable: it was the ever-lighted torch of his being; like that of the gazelle, it seemed to have kept the burning reflection of the southern sun. His face, glowing with a kind of inward ardor, had by degrees gained something of the sun-burned and emaciated aspect of the desert tribes. When draped in a white woollen *bournous* he might have been mistaken for a Ziban cadi on a trip to Paris. I was always struck with the indelible stamp left

upon him by the African climate, even upon his speech. His voice, which could so ably follow the capricious windings of his talk, was musical and vibrating, with a caressing softness that rendered it irresistible; it had something of the subtle charm of the Oriental idiom.



Fromentin, who was in the habit of condensing and concentrating his thought, was, in intimate society, in his moments of ease and repose, the most seductive talker in the world. He had, after a fashion, the fire, the picturesque biting force, and the winged fancy, of the Arabian story-teller. I remember hearing one of these improvisers, under the Moorish arcade of the old Djebbia

gate at Constantine. I did not understand what he was saying, which must have been very interesting, from the silent attention of his listeners, but I took a most lively pleasure in following his gestures, at once restrained and expressive, in observing the eloquence of his whole countenance, and in studying the incessant play of his look while I listened with delight to the music of his voice. Later, when I heard Fromentin converse, I thought of the improviser at the Djebbia gate. How charming he was when he opened before you, to borrow one of his own expressions, his "drawer of ideas"! What exquisite pages he has thus written, which have been wafted away!

As to the moral Fromentin, — the inner man, — if I could I would paint him with a word: he was a true sensitive plant. Nature had made him as nervous as a woman; and if he had not had within himself the antidote of ever wakeful prudence and extreme reserve, he would have left behind on his way the better part of himself. By this reserve of manner, by this prudence, full of tact in all relations, and also by the constant determination to restrain his imagination, he was able to make of his life and himself, as his illustrious friend has said, "a model of delicacy, taste, perseverance, and distinction."

II.

THE PAINTER.



I HAVE carefully studied Fromentin's way of painting, and followed it in its different phases, and I must say with sincerity that I find it exceedingly interesting, and in certain directions, for instance in delicacy and spirit, truly admirable. Everything is very much a question of measure and comparison, and I compare the fine works of Fromentin with the best that are painted to-day. Let us take, if you will, the great *Falcon Hunt* recently sold in the Laurent Richard collection. What landscape, now that Daubigny is dead, can be brought into comparison with this flowing, luminous, aerial page, at once calm and full, in which Algeria, that land of all grace and beauty, seems to adorn itself with immortal youth? What sky can be found deeper, lighter, more delicate, more living? What atmosphere more subtle? What diffusion of light more tender? What smile of festive nature more exquisite?

And what smoothness in the tone! What transparency in the material! We must agree that nothing so intimately artistic, nothing of such perfect balance, is produced now. I do not wish by this comparison, which the simultaneous exhibitions of the Champ de Mars, and the Champs Élysées have aroused in my mind, to lower any one. I only desire to mark an elevation. Fromentin belongs to that great epoch in the art of painting which begins with Delacroix, and ends with Corot, passing through Rousseau, Millet, and Daubigny. He is the last of this noble line; he is the bond which, while terminating it, binds it to the period of transition and unrest in the midst of which we struggle. Later, I will say certain things concerning his rôle, and his influence, which, although very modest, was none the less important; but now I wish only to declare one thing, which is that Fromentin is a painter of rank, a true and delightful painter,—I mean as well in the material quality of his methods, as in their intelligent use. In judging him, let us not forget that he is always and above all a delicate soul; that his mind, of a singular native aristocracy, was one of the most lofty and cultivated minds of his generation; that he was first of all a literary man, and in him the literary man has surpassed the painter to the very end by his absolute value.

From all this results something complex and refined, which is not the art of the crowd, and which must be enjoyed leisurely, a little at a time. I will speak especially of his execution, which is neither very powerful nor very striking at the first glance, but which presents an assemblage of merits, which have become more and more

rare, and the union of which it will soon be impossible to find. His weaknesses, such as they are, are not in his execution: they are, — and the dear and deeply regretted master knew them better than any one, and struggled incessantly to make them disappear, — they are, I say, in the insufficiency of his technical education. Nature, for landscape, is the great and sole master; and in Fromentin the landscape



painter is always marvellous. For drawing the human figure, on the contrary, as for drawing animals, long, patient, arduous studio studies are necessary: nothing takes their place. Impression, in the recent sense of the word, is Utopian. Velasquez is an impressionist, I agree, but an impressionist whose agile hand works upon his canvas with an unerring knowledge. Fromentin had not that

knowledge. I will come back to that point. I wish only to remark that intelligence and gifts were so great in Fromentin that they veil and almost cause to disappear his weaknesses in grammar. He began painting quite late in life, at first with curiosity, then with passion. In him is seen the unusual spectacle of a literary man who undertakes to hold the brush, and who, from the first onset, wishes to paint the pictures of a painter, and those only. This point must not be lost sight of.

I may be permitted to prefer the writer, at least to find him more sure of himself, stronger, completer, in a word, more capable of producing a perfect work; but it must be remembered that the writer and the painter are both original, and perfectly sincere, and that each has his own value, quite independent, and entirely limited, although parallel. This is an almost unique phenomenon, indeed I may say unique. "He has two muses," says Sainte-Beuve, "he is a painter in two languages, an amateur in neither, he is a conscientious artist, fine and severe in both." In Delacroix, to whom one would willingly be tempted to compare him, the writer, although correct and practised, was at so great a distance from the painter that the merit of the one is lost in the glory of the other: his literature is the ordinary commonplace that can easily be attained by any man of the world, possessed of taste and some education. One man alone perhaps possessed at the same time the two very different tools of artist and writer; that was Berlioz. But the pen of Berlioz, which is brilliant, full of fire, unexpectedness, and audacity, remains always in his hands, except in a few admirable opera books, an offensive or

defensive weapon. It is the weapon of a critic and a polemic, and here again the artist has so great a genius, that the writer, although much superior in Berlioz to what he is in Delacroix, is effaced before him.

With Fromentin it is not so: the two modes of expression are in perfect harmony, and form a symmetrical whole. Fromentin was always able to pass from one to the other with equal facility, painting even with the brush the very picture he had before painted with the pen. Two facts explain this surprising facility, which was first revealed in the volumes of the "Sahara" and the "Sahel," and which, under another form, was continued in the "Old Masters" and in "Dominique,"—on one side, an identical aim in the two methods, that of seizing the true, clear, pictorial aspect of men and things, especially the exterior aspect, the landscape aspect, I may so call it, of nature, the most minute accidents of which he retains; on the other hand, and directed by the same sense, a prodigious memory, a special memory, for physical and topographical forms, the sort of memory that Gautier had with less precision. It was this memory which in 1874 enabled him to paint and impregnate with perfectly Algerian poetry that admirable *Falcon Hunt* of which I have spoken. He took pains in the romance of "Dominique," which, as we know, has certain characteristics of an autobiography, to himself define this memory as "not very sensitive to facts, but of singular aptitude in receiving impressions."

Another condition of his being shows itself in him as a unique characteristic. This is his eye, such a painter's eye as few have pos-

sessed, which he utilized equally for book or picture. It is with that eye that he wrote in the "Sahara," of that June day at El Aghouat, so full of heat, drought, and exhaustion, which undoubtedly will remain the finest page of picturesque literature that our language has produced. With that same eye he painted from memory the *Simoom* and the *Nomadic Tribe on a Journey.*

This wholly physical gift, to which his marvellous spirit of observation added moreover a thousand resources, is already shown in his first picture, *A Farm in the Neighborhood of La Rochelle*, which, as I have before said, belongs to Monsieur Bataillard. This small picture, which figured in the Salon of 1847, is his oldest work. It dates from 1846. It can then be considered as the one most characteristic of his first manner. Looking at it superficially, it is only heavy and pasty, but it already contains curious marks of Fromentin's truth of observation. It betrays no other influence than Cabat's; it is a timid and simple work, but neither foolish nor vulgar. It is all the more interesting, when one knows that this farm is the country house at St. Maurice where he was brought up, and whither he came to die. It is the little cottage which he described at the beginning of "A Year in the Sahel," when he restores liberty to the robin which had flown into his cabin on the boat. All who have read the book will remember this charming episode: "'Knowest thou?' said I to it, before returning it to its fate, and casting it upon the wind which should carry it away, and the sea to which I confided it, — 'knowest thou, upon a coast where I may have seen thee, a white village in a pale country, where bitter absinthe grows



VIEW TAKEN FROM EL KANTARA.

Fac-simile of a drawing by Eugène Fromentin.

to the very edge of the hay fields? Knowest thou a silent house, often closed, an avenue of lindens where few walk, footpaths under a chilly wood where dead leaves are early heaped, where birds of thy kind dwell through the autumn and winter? If thou knowest that region, and that country house which is mine, return thither, if only for a day, and bear news of me to those who there remain.'"

In the same Salon of 1847 he exhibited the picture of the *Gorges of La Chiffa*. It was painted after the excursion to Algiers and Blidah in 1846. It was his first contact with the public. The work was noticed, and, as it appears, deservedly noticed. I know it solely by the traces it left in the Salons of that time, although Gautier in the "Presse," only mentions it very dryly. It was not shown at the posthumous exhibition at the École des Beaux-Arts. It is, however, very important, because it is the lifting of the curtain of Algeria in the work of Fromentin. The beauty of the region, which at that time was new to the Parisians, the crystalline firmness of the execution, which recalled that of Marilhat, everything about it was of a nature to attract attention. Dating from that picture, Fromentin's path was indicated, the precious lode uncovered. An unrivalled country, unknown hitherto, was to unfold before our eyes its infinite variety.

During all this period, which begins in 1847 and includes about ten years, I will note, as the predominating quality of the painter, his attentive pursuit of methods of execution. His mind hesitates, it seems to be seeking its course. I say this in the best sense, and as an evidence of the sincerity and the extreme delicacy of his artistic

sense. Moreover, a probity in labor which is never satisfied is still another mark of Fromentin's temperament. I shall often have occasion to return to that perpetual self-exaction which he practised, and to that anxiety which soon became a fever.

At this time Marilhat is almost his sole guide, at least by a general influence of manner and style; for imitation under any form whatever — I mean conscious imitation — was always Fromentin's horror. He does not imitate Marilhat, but he studies him with enthusiasm. Traces of Marilhat become very visible in his work; those of Cabat remain latent, though very real. It was the time when the author of *A View of Egypt in Twilight*, who died at the age of thirty-six, was in all the glow of his fresh renown. The man and the painter were, moreover, of a nature to leave a strong impression upon Fromentin. Their two natures had points of contact. When I try to imagine what Marilhat was on his return from Egypt in 1833, browned by the sun, and seemingly burning with an inward fire, but full of life and spirit, full of originality and ardor in conversation, of sovereign distinction of mind and manners, modest and timid wherever his work was concerned, I think of Fromentin. At bottom, the art of the painter of Egypt is of the same order as that of the painter of Algeria: in both was the same education of eye and brain, the same tendency to idealize the truth, which is the peculiarity of cultivated natures, the same research for elegant lines and harmonious balance, developing under sincere, exacting, attentive study, refining the work as well as the general subject. To idealize, harmonize, synthetize the truth, even the absolute truth, — to

make it speak, in a word, an expressive language, — such is the art of true masters, such is the aim constantly pursued by Fromentin, which he has fully attained in a unique fashion in his books, and often attained in his pictures. The example of Marilhat has not



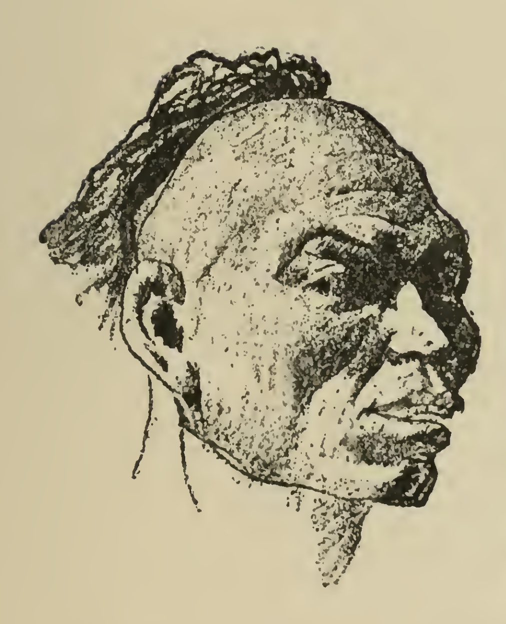
a little contributed to confirm him in this course, which maintains in some way the equilibrium between independence and tradition.

Besides, outside of the character of the works of this period, there is a written and positive trace of the admiration of Fromentin for Marilhat, in his volume of the "Sahel." He speaks without nam-

ing them, in one of the most interesting pages of the book, of the three great orientalists, Decamps, Marilhat, and Delacroix, — the *genre* painter, the landscape painter, and the painter of history. One reads between the lines that the landscape painter is his preference. He finds in him, more than in the two others, the exact and clear knowledge of men and things, the sentiments they awaken, their intimate expression, and especially their physical aspect.

"His work," he says, "is the exquisite and perfect illustration of a journey whose text he might have written himself; for he brought to it, in writing as in painting, the same exactness of glance, the same vivacity of style and expression. . . . The landscape painter, by some singular predestination, was born a painter of the Orient."

CHAPTER III.



THE influence of Marilhat upon Fromentin was manifested from 1847 to 1850 in a still more marked way. A curious testimony to this influence appeared in a picture which figured at his posthumous exhibition under the number 7, representing the *Harvest in Algeria*. Great trees with interlaced branches, a red heaven, pouring down its glowing light upon a landscape, blocked off like a wall of masonry, a search for noble, but rather theatrical effect; all these remind one of Marilhat, but rather of his faults than his merits: it is Marilhat at his worst. The *Tents of the Smala of Si-Hamed-bel-Hadj* (*Sahara*), an episode of his journey to Biskra, from which we have reproduced an interesting study in black and white chalk, March 11, 1848 (No. 263 of the sale after his death), reveals a more characteristic accent, and a more direct impression of nature. This picture figured in the Salon of

1849 with four other canvases, memories of his second journey to Algeria, — *A Smala passing the Wad Biraz*, the *Barracks of the Suburb Bab-a-Zoun*, a *Street at Constantine*, and the *Place de la Brèche*. That year Fromentin obtained a second-class medal. He had made one more step, and an important one, upon a ground which was soon to become his own domain. What appeared on the surface only an accident in his career as a painter was already the law of his talent and his life. Algeria, from the first contact, conquered him by her enchanting poetry. No long reflection was necessary to make him feel that the true Orient was still a new field, in spite of the three painters who had caused it to glitter in the eyes of the romantic generation. Its intimate, peculiar, and individual side still remained to be rendered.

None of these five pictures, which would have been very instructive, were visible either at his sale or at the exposition on the Quai Malaquais. The *Place de la Brèche at Constantine*, which belongs to M. Du Mesnil, is found in the catalogue, but it was not exhibited. It is, moreover, rather a feeble work. On the other hand, there was noticeable a charming little picture of the same epoch, *Wandering Arabs striking their Tents*, No. 77, belonging also to M. Du Mesnil, which figured in the Salon of 1850. It was an evening effect of exquisite sentiment, superb in tone, of firm execution and transparent painting. The fading sky, the soft bluish shadows, the depths of space, the motionless air, the radiation of the still warm earth, the dark profiles of the tents, everything in this vividly impressional work, breathes the tranquil calm of an African evening, — those

evenings almost without twilight, where " night falls like a swoon." We think Fromentin had hitherto done nothing manifesting such keen perception. Already can be noted in him that purpose which plays a leading part in all his works, — I mean the study and rendering of light in its thousand variations, of hour and day and climate, of season and surroundings, and particularly of that diffused light which envelops and softens objects. At the same time we behold taking



form that great care, which does him so much honor, to give, as nature does, detail and breadth at the same time; passing gradually from analysis to synthesis, and the endeavor, — in spite of his prodigious talent for observation and the sensitive acuteness which often compels him to refinement of detail, — to see things on the whole in their simplicity.

The Salon of 1850, which it would be more just to call the Salon of 1851 because it was opened on the 30th of December at the Palais

Royal, then Palais National, gives us the result of his journey to Biskra. Fromentin was in full eruption there, if not in quality, at least in quantity, for he exhibited eleven pictures. I have taken the list from the catalogue, and I think that it is not without interest, on account of the subjects themselves, to which some explanatory legends are added.

1179. *Nomadic Arabs striking Camp.* "The Arab of the Tell says, in speaking of the denizens of the Sahara: Ye are ever travelling like locusts, — far from hunger, and near to thirst."

1180. *Women returning from drawing Water.* — "The male denizen of the Sahara does absolutely nothing. Labor is left to women. It is theirs to provide wood and water."

1181. *Douar of the Sahara; Evening Effect.* "The wandering Arab is encamped in a vast plain; around him nothing disturbs the silence. His house is but a fragment of cloth stretched by bones driven into the sand."

1182. *Biskra; Village of the Zibans.*
1183. *Foukhala; Spring.*
1184. *Biskra; A Burial.*
1185. *Marabout in the Oasis.*
1186. *Tolga; Village of the Zibans.*
1187. *Plain of En-Furchi; Route from Constantine to Batna.*
1188. *The Camp pitched; Morning Effect.*
1189. *The Camp pitched; Evening Effect.*

None of these pictures, which were rather studies than composed pictures, has been seen again, except the first, which was at the exhibition on the Quai Malaquais.

From this period (1846 to 1852, the year of his third journey to Africa) date a certain number of drawings which appeared at the



AN ARAB OF EL AGHOUAT.

sale after his death. They are more marked and precise in execution, and yet much more timid than those which follow, but of a picturesque truth, already very remarkable. They are easy to recognize, Fromentin using then for his studies in two tints, red lead pencil or red chalk, and quite a thick yellowish white paper. The *Smala of Hamed-bel-Hadj*, the *View of an Oasis*, that we have reproduced, and that near the beginning of Chapter II., also the *Arab on a Camel*, which decorates the letter, belong to this period. There is even reason to presume, from a passage in one of Fromentin's letters to M. Dumesnil, that they were executed in a particular place.

I cannot speak to you of a stay that we made among a tribe of the Sahara ten leagues farther south, with our much-to-be-regretted friend, the Sheik Si-Hamed-bel-Hadj ben Ganah. They were unequalled days. I cannot deflower this subject, which deserves a religious recital. It is truly the finest pearl in all of my memories.

Ah, dear friend, poor dear friend, you who put an exclamation point after Sidi-Maloui ! dear friend, why have you not passed with us these silent evenings under the black woollen tent, amidst the great travelling camp, our host beside us, the door of the tent, facing eastward, open towards the interminable horizon of the desert, and the sun setting below the other equally unbounded horizon, while troops of camels defiled under the red sky? I have drawings, sketches, and notes of all those places.

A plan for publication which then attracted Fromentin, will explain their peculiarly careful execution, different from the general rule of beginners in painting, who usually have a dry manner. A trace of this project, which had no results, is found in the fragment

of a letter published by M. Burty.[1] He had thought, without doubt, of making, with the companion of his journey, Auguste Salzmann, an album of African sights and scenes accompanied by a descriptive text.

Our project of publication, he said, is in a fair way of being executed. If circumstances at Paris do not forbid, it will take place. We shall have nearly all the necessary elements. I cannot, dear friend, satisfy your legitimate desire to anticipate our returning by despoiling that portfolio already so crammed with drawings, great and small, lightly sketched or carefully executed, sketches of movement, of mosques, or of palms. We have a little of everything, and it is exact. There is progress, visible progress. We give ourselves a great deal of trouble, and within a month we have cured some faults and found new resources. What wealth we should have, if in all the five months the work had progressed as it does now! What we have done, amid the continual changing of place, and deducting the days when we were travelling, is astonishing, I assure you. I reckon that we have still a month for work, deducting the days when we are on horseback.

Fromentin thought again later of his project to illustrate a new edition of the "Sahara" and the "Sahel," but death left him no time to set his portfolios in order for such a work. M. Eugène Plon, guided by the advice of the friends of the family, profited by the idea on his own account. He produced the well known beautiful work, which is a true illustration of the "Sahara" and "Sahel,"[2] and as complete as the wide dispersion of the designs would permit.

[1] Drawings of Eugène Fromentin, Paris and London.

[2] Eugène Fromentin, "Sahara and Sahel," illustrated edition with twelve etchings.

Marilhat's influence continued. A very well known picture by Fromentin, *A Moorish Burial*, exhibited in the Salon of 1853, shows that it was crossed by the passing influence of Diaz, which, however, was not a happy one. The composition is fine, the attitudes true, — the subject adapted itself to them; but the execution is heavy, pasty, and the colors too dazzling. It was a visiting card sent to the Salon. At that time Fromentin was in Algeria for the third time. He saw El Aghouat, and passed two months there in the height of summer, writing letters to M. Dumesnil, and collecting from nature that harvest of drawings, the appearance of which, after his death, was so great a pleasure for us, and so precious a teaching. He accumulated materials in his portfolios and in his memory. At this period, 1852–53, was born his virility as a painter and a writer. Time confirmed his talent, but added nothing essential to it.

We shall find the writer again later. The painter appeared with all his intensity of observation in the drawings made during this last stay in Algeria, which, as we know, lasted a whole year. They can be distinguished from the others at the first glance, and are much more individual than those of the preceding journeys. They are all drawn with black lead pencil, and stumped, frequently heightened with white, upon very rough gray paper, or with black crayon. Almost all bear the name of the place where the artist's camp-stool was planted, the date, and sometimes the hour. They are studies from nature, and their execution is consequently broad, concise, rough, and even brutal, full of clear, incisive characteristics, with the predominant effect very salient. The extremities, the hands and feet

are scarcely indicated, but their movement is correct, active, and in many cases of truly exquisite eloquence. These drawings deserve to be narrowly studied by the rising school, if it would convince itself of the necessity of adding intellectual culture to very sensitive perceptions, and would understand the immense superiority it gives to the eye and hand of him who possesses it. It is to this, as well as to his inner sense, that Fromentin owes that incessant attention to style, synthesis, and choice of subject or work, which stamps his impressions with such peculiar intensity, and leaves him unrivalled. His pencil expresses at once, with a certainty of feeling profoundly striking, the very genius of the Algerian country, that is to say, the East in its noblest and most refined form. I say this the more readily, because I have visited those regions, and am myself an ardent admirer of them. He has translated the poetry of the South in its more elevated forms, exaggerating nothing of its violence, but rendering it in its full force. He interrogates it under every aspect, but his sincerity leads him to skip the detail, to retain the decided accent; an indication of the whole suffices him. His is thus the work of a true master. Although in certain ways his tool is still unskilful, he says only what he means to say, and very often all that he means to say. The note he strikes is so true and frank that he was able to live to the end upon this first fund. "What strikes me," wrote M. Maxime Du Camp, "is the extraordinary truth of the impression he gives." For those who know Africa, this is the eulogium which returns to mind, before each of his drawings. If I did not fear that my thought would be unfavorably interpreted, I would add that the

best of the painter in Fromentin lies there. Always in direct contact with nature there is a flower of simplicity, that distance effaces, however durable may be the force of memory, and I have already said that in Fromentin memory was an extraordinary quality.

We reproduce in our work some of his drawings, the greater part of which were at his sale; and I cannot, in relation to them, prevent myself from recalling a page of the volume of the "Sahara," which explains their character.

A painter's remark, which I note in passing, is that, just inversely to what is seen in Europe, pictures here are composed of shadow, with a dark centre and edges of light. It is like Rembrandt transposed: nothing can be more mysterious.

This shadow of the countries of light, you know. It is inexpressible; it is something obscure and transparent, limpid, and many-hued; it may be likened to deep water. It seems black, and when the eye plunges into it, we are surprised at seeing very plainly. Suppress the sun, and this shadow itself becomes light. Figures float in a kind of pale golden atmosphere in which their outlines vanish. Look at them now as they sit; their white garments almost melt into the walls; their naked feet are scarcely indicated upon the ground, and but for the faces which make spots of brown in this vague whole, they would seem to be petrified statues of mud, baked, like the houses, in the sun.

Fromentin had elsewhere prepared himself for this climatic vision, which was the true school of his individuality, by his two preceding journeys, and by that sojourn at St. Raphael, on the luminous coasts of Provence, which he made shortly after his marriage, before his departure for Algiers. Like an instrument that is being tuned, up

to that time all that he had done was but a prelude. At the same birth the painter of the *Simoom* and the writer of the "Sahara" were to come into being, from the effect of that great isolation on the journey to El Aghouat, and the long repose at Blidah and Mustapha in Algiers.

I find the traces of this decided shock in certain fragments of private letters addressed to M. Du Mesnil. There will be found in them as in all his letters, those habits of modesty and self-study which rendered Fromentin so sympathetic to those to whom he opened his soul. He wrote to his friend some days after his arrival at El Aghouat: —

Everything goes well, only I wish I knew more, were more robust, were a great painter, and had a day without an end; then I could show to *the astonished world* what a fine country is. What harrows me is thinking in advance of the little I shall carry away from this immense mine where everything remains still to be taken.

I take no satisfaction in the merits I have acquired, and I am only struck by the missing qualities. This is the last and truest word of my opinion of my own painting.

It is most wonderful that from the beginning people have been determined, in spite of everything and in spite of myself, to make a painter of me before my time. What you expect of me is still more alarming, for I do not wish to fail you, and it must be said, you are almost as severe with me as I am with myself, but much more ambitious. I am not ambitious,— at least I do not know it if I am. I know not whither I am going; something as vague as an instinct, but as violent as the strongest passion, pushes me into the depths of a furrow whose end I neither see nor care for, and I know not whither it is leading me.



ARAB DOWAR AT AÏN-OUSERA.

Fac-simile of a drawing by Eugène Fromentin.

It is not joy I feel here, nor happiness. It would be difficult for me to explain it. I never experienced such an indifference to a place, in spite of a strong desire to make something of it. I visit this country, as one examines his prey, — eagerly, with curiosity and satisfaction, but without love, and I feel that the day when I can leave it without leaving too much behind me, when I shall have extracted what I came here to seek, will surely be the most joyful day of my journey.

I fear that I have not been very clear in the brief description that I tried to make of El Aghouat. It is in any case difficult, and especially for me, who know nothing about describing from nature, and whose impressions are expressed easily only from memory.

It is admirable weather. The day has been, perhaps, the most beautiful I have seen in Africa. I wish I had forty arms, and days without a night, and a brain proof against all fatigue.

It is very hot. We have now an average of 40° Centigrade [104° Fahr.] in the shade, and 60° [140° F.] in the sun. For two days we had the mercury at 62° [143° F.] and 64° [147° F.] I shall have put all my good will into this journey. People would be less astonished perhaps at the little I shall bring away, if they knew under what conditions of temperature and material life one works at El Aghouat in the heat of summer. Everything that lives here sleeps three quarters of the day. If I stayed longer I feel that the climate would get the better of me also, and that work would not carry the day against sleep.

I will pass rapidly over the Salon of 1857, in spite of the importance, in number and especial interest, of the pictures exhibited. Fromentin had not yet departed from his original manner. The method of his painting there shows itself greatly strengthened, but not sensibly modified, and we are to find him at his maximum of force and brilliancy in the Salon of 1859. It is more strong than tender, the full and flowing painting recalling that of Cabat and

Marilhat; it has the brilliancy and the softness of pure tints that the enamel of age will transform into precious stones. The blues, reds, greens, and russets are superb, and their sonorous tones are juxtaposed with boldness. Although M. Edmond About, in the account he gave in the "Presse," as successor of Théophile Gautier, who had passed into the "Moniteur," regretted concerning Fromentin's share of the exhibition that "its execution, which is slightly scratchy, ranks him among the victims of M. Decamps," we must recognize that at this time the style of the young master, as well as his picturesque and expressive interpretation of the East, is free from juvenile uncertainties. Fromentin exists already as an undoubted painter; his method belongs to him, and to him alone. His studies now will be directed only to execution, in which we shall see him at every stage evolving a more delicate register, — the register of Corot, in which gray is always the basis of the harmony. Without losing anything of his eminent qualities as a colorist, he becomes, little by little, beginning with 1859, more of a harmonist. The serious complaint that can be made concerning the pictures of this first period, which is his period of most intense production, is the existence of a certain hardness of outline, and, except in certain works which succeeded admirably, a certain rigidity in the perspective lines of the landscape. There is also a real want of atmosphere in the foreground.

The titles of the seven pictures exhibited in the Salon in 1857, were *Woodcock Hunters*, *Arabs hunting the Falcon*, *Arabian Merchants Travelling*, *Halt of Merchants near El Aghouat*, *Wandering Tribe on a Journey*, *Diffa*, *Evening Reception*, and *Gazelle*

Hunting in the Hodna. The last two remain celebrated among Fromentin's works: the composition of the *Diffa* has a remarkable movement and nobility; the numerous drawings at the sale, made for this picture, give an exact idea of it. All the pictures of this first period having unfortunately for the most part left France, and having been dispersed in Belgium, Switzerland, England, and America, one only of the seven canvases of 1857 was found at the posthumous exhibition, perhaps the least interesting of all. This is the *Halt of Merchants before El Aghouat*, which belongs to M. van Praët of Brussels.

Let us stop at the great Salon, the royal Salon for Fromentin's work, that of 1859. That year the painter of Algeria, already celebrated by his two volumes, deserved the unanimous acclamations of the public and the press. He was recompensed, as I have said, by a first medal, and the Cross of the Legion of Honor. His success was complete, and it was a rare success: the most difficult judges yielded without reserve. Théophile Gautier, whose *Salons* had acquired exceptional importance, devoted a whole article in the "Moniteur" of May 26, to the five contributions of Fromentin, — *Negro Mountebanks*, *A Street at El Aghouat*, *Edge of an Oasis during a Sirocco*, *Souvenir of Algeria*, and *An Audience at a Caliphate.* Three of these pictures, the last three, which certainly were among the most characteristic, were at the Exhibition on the Quai Malaquais.

The *Negro Mountebanks* was an extremely vivacious picture, of such striking effect and attraction, that no one who ever saw it has

forgotten it. The spectacle chosen was one of the most lively of all those furnished by Algeria, and I cannot resist the pleasure of citing in full the description of it made by the pen of Théophile Gautier.

Negro Mountebanks are going from one oasis and one tribe to another, driving before them over the arid plain, bristling with dry tufts of alfa, the half-starved donkey which bears their conjuring apparatus. When they meet a travelling camp, they improvise a performance; and these black spectres, striped with sparkling rags, and tarnished tinsel from which the sun can extract a gleam, begin to gambol oddly against a white background, to the sound of their crotales and tarboukas, twisting themselves, throwing themselves about, and gesticulating like intoxicated monkeys. The sweat pours down their bronze faces, and their thick lips open with great laughs, and reveal the gleam of pearls.

The *Audience at a Caliphate in the Sahara*, which now belongs to M. Tabourier, of which a copy was shown at the Quai Malaquais, awakens no less enthusiasm under Gautier's pen. In fact it is a superbly vigorous picture, all aflame with luminous contrasts, broad, tranquil, and frank in execution, and rendered metallic by the ruddy waves of a sunshine which intensifies the whites, and renders the shadows vibrating. The composition is of a touching simplicity. A group of horsemen has stopped before the lofty peristyle of palm trunks coated with whitewash, under which the Cadi, cross-legged in his white bournous, with a solemn, fierce, bronzed face, gives audience amid his followers. The chief has descended from his horse, and comes to embrace him. The light strikes the pediment of the peristyle, and cutting the wall in the rear, as in De la Croix's *Jewish Marriage*, concentrates the effect upon the central group, and throws

into relief all these white-robed figures. It is the true Sahara with its violent, heroic, feudal poetry. Gautier declares this picture one of the most perfect that M. Eugène Fromentin has yet produced, "who," he says, "has made a manner for himself at once original, clever, and full of life." I cannot contradict this judgment; but a picture exhibited at this same Salon, which I consider as the real masterpiece of Fromentin, moves me even more, and that is the *Simoom*.

This little canvas, which measures only seventy-one centimetres in height, by a little more than a metre in breadth, is truly a pure marvel. It belonged to M. Buloz, the editor of the "Revue des Deux Mondes," and shortly after, the family had the courage to separate themselves from it, and to put it up for sale. It was bought at an absurd price, six thousand francs, I think, by M. Georges Petit. What were the Louvre and the Luxembourg doing at that time? Meditating, doubtless. In the etching which the clever point of M. Maxime Lalanne has made, he has preserved its title of *Simoom* as the best known, although its official qualification was *Edge of an Oasis during a Sirocco*, which is the true one. "It seems," said Gautier once more, "as if the wind cannot be painted, being a colorless and formless thing, and yet it blows visibly in M. Fromentin's picture." In the full force of a term which should only be employed with reserve, it is a masterpiece, because everything in it is in unison; the poetical idea, truth of impression, and the quality of the painting. In painting it, has Fromentin not thought of that impetuous little etching by Rembrandt, so incomparable in color,

which he recalls on the second page of the "Sahara" to paint the pathetic side of the traveller's life: "Three bristling trees, gnarled in shape, and rough in foliage; on the left a plain as far as the eye can reach, a great sky whence an immense storm cloud is descending, and in the plain two imperceptible travellers, travelling hastily, and flying with backs to the wind"? It is possible. The subject is taken, as far as I can judge, on the southern edge of the Oasis of Biskra. But what M. Lalanne's engraving cannot render is the extraordinary delicacy of the tawny gray tone the monochrome of which renders, almost to the point of illusion, the large waves of sand which rise in the atmosphere, in oblique, close eddies, and cover the sky little by little with a funeral veil. When art arrives at this height of expression it almost equals nature; however, the case is rare. Such are Ruysdael's *Gleam of Sunshine*, and Rousseau's *Hoar Frost*.

The *Souvenir of Algeria*, which belongs, I think, to M. Beugniet, is one of the most solidly painted Fromentins that I know. It must be older than its date. I should not be surprised if it were painted in Algeria itself. Our friend Paul Mantz, in the first Salon of the "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," speaks of this picture and of the others in a tone of warm enthusiasm. He admires in it the group of horsemen with shining costumes scattered like rubies upon the green slopes of a valley traversed by a Roman aqueduct.

As to the *Street at El Aghouat*, it is a work of architectural character, and, but for its small size, I should say almost monumental. I cannot think without a thrill of this homesick dream of

sunshine, heat, and silence. At a stroke he sums up the character of the cities of the Sahara. It is the "Country of Thirst," lived in, felt, and translated. The synthesis of a sensation of the whole thing could go no farther, and this synthesis we find in the written com-



mentary he himself gives upon his picture in his description of the street Bab-el-Gharbi from the Western Gate. "About one o'clock a shadow begins to be faintly drawn upon the pavement; while sitting, you do not yet have it upon your feet; standing, the sun still breathes upon your head. You must flatten yourself against the

wall and make yourself narrow. The reflection from the sun and the walls is terrific; dogs utter little barks when they have to pass over this metallic pavement; all the shops exposed to the sun are closed; the end of the street, towards the west, waves in white flames; feeble sounds are heard vibrating in the air that might be taken for the breathing of the panting earth. One by one, however, are seen issuing from the half-opened doors tall figures, pale and dreary, clad in white, with the appearance of being more exhausted than pensive; they come with blinking eyes and bowed heads, making for themselves of the shadow of their veils a shelter for the whole body under this perpendicular sun. One after the other they range themselves along the wall, sitting or lying where they can find room. These are the husbands and brothers and youths who come to finish their day's work. They began it on the left side of the pavement; this is the only difference in their habits between the morning and the evening."

CHAPTER IV.

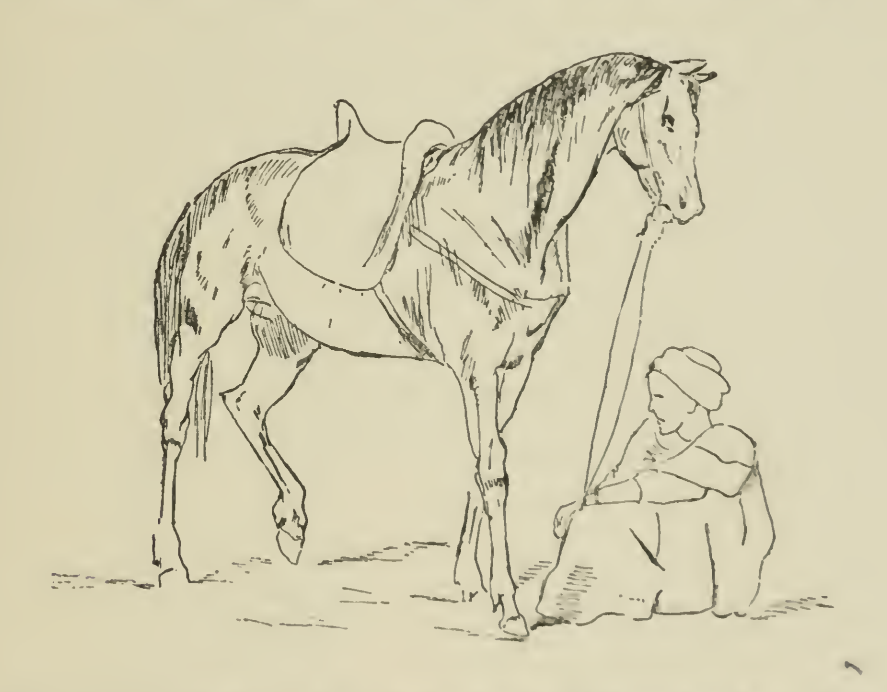


THE picture of the *Edge of an Oasis during the Sirocco* is the bridge which connects Fromentin's first manner of painting with that which, from 1861, with fluctuations, stationary periods, beatings to right and left, and many gropings, he finally followed, and unceasingly perfected. He indicates with great clearness his primary desire, — the rendering of values of tone rather in their delicacy and harmony than in their opposition; a passionate endeavor to acquire a supple hand upon the keyboard of the changing colors of nature, as well as upon that of her monochromatic scales, and to finally raise himself to the lofty ideal of the painters of light. The knowing ones already could foresee in the artist of the *Edge of an Oasis* one of the best endowed harmonists of the French school. Corot, the grand harmonist, converted him to his exquisite

grace, and his doctrines became engrafted upon the influences that I have before indicated. Gray, the divine gray of Corot, intervenes, under the brush of Fromentin, to envelop and soften lines. From henceforth, almost unconsciously to himself, this becomes his great purpose. At the time he feels all its value by instinct, which is not without merit at a period when the romantic current still precipitated artists towards excesses of forced tone and great oppositions of color; later, by pen, word, and brush, he became its eloquent apostle. Grays, silver grays, amethyst or turquoise grays, insinuated themselves into his coloring, to redouble their delicacy, without taking anything from their impulsive energy. This beneficent gray is the air, the envelope, the soft atmosphere. See Velasquez, see Ruysdael and Brauwer, Van Goyen and Teniers, Chardin and Prud'hon; see, finally, our dear and much-regretted Corot, whose importance in the naturalistic movement of contemporary art will soon be appreciated, let us hope, at its full value.

Marilhat, Decamps, Delacroix, — the latter not from the point of view of methods, but of resources in coloring, and, to say truth, rather on account of the admiration that Fromentin expresses on every occasion for his genius than from any result he draws from it in his work, — and Corot above all, — these are the masters, among the moderns, with whom the singer of the "Sahel" has had the most natural affinity. Marilhat was the adoration of his youth, but at the last Corot became his supreme lord. He loved him, understood him, and admired him, with a truly contagious enthusiasm. He said, without circumlocution, and almost with violence, — he who loved in every-

thing shades and temperament, — that Corot was the great master, the living and generous source, from which the school should drink. When on this subject his conversation was animated by a singular ardor. I remember a conversation that I had one morning with him in his studio upon the painter of the *Souvenir of Marissel,* — that unique masterpiece, felt and rendered from nature, that we saw



reappear, not long ago, at the Laurent Richard sale. Fromentin was in fine spirits; his wit was lively, his conversation full of point. Everything he said of Corot — of the part he played, of his bold innovations, of his incomparable sentiment for light, of his delightful sensitiveness, of his exquisite perception of the exact tone — was worth retaining; and I would have wished to be his stenographer. It was a marvellous improvised article, the foundation of which was a

vigorous conviction. I felt, under the brilliant, almost winged, turn of his words, warm emotion, and opinions long reflected upon and studied. "Somewhere," he cried in conclusion, "I must find the time before I die to write what I think of our old Corot!" That time never came, and it is forever to be regretted, for the things he would have written would have been of very great instructiveness. Who shall write them now?

His judgments upon the painting of Corot would have cast very clear light upon his own, especially upon the efforts of his last years. It is certain that, without Corot, Fromentin would not have painted his delicious little masterpiece, *An Arab March in the Desert*, in which the gray is clothed with the most penetrating poetry.

To return to the year 1861. Fromentin, up to the time of the *Edge of an Oasis*, paints with relative dryness; his coloring, tending towards the warm scale, is powerful, even brilliant, and of a vibrating intensity, with glazings of great richness; but it lacks blending, gradations, and atmosphere. The treatment, which is very smooth, appears rigid, and the paint, very transparent in the lights and in the decided tones, particularly in the greens and reds, is opaque in the shadows and dull in the half tints; the web is of very close tissue, but the embroidery lacks suppleness.

From the time of the Salon of 1861, on the contrary, Fromentin is shown with new qualities. In the first place, he has raised himself from studies to pictures: he has left the Sahara for the Sahel, the sun of summer for the freshness and verdure of spring. He seeks to paint clearly, and, little by little, to paint with more unity and fresh-



ARABS OF THE SOUTH.

From a stumped-pencil drawing of Eugène Fromentin.

ness. His wonderfully true instinct counsels him to avoid black as a mortal enemy, — that black affected by certain painters, who by this means think to imitate the old masters. All the delicate grays, which are the luminous half-tints of white, imperceptibly appeared under his brush lighter and more flexible in every picture. After having shown himself a distinguished colorist, he became, what he remained, a harmonist, in the most subtle sense. He justified, much better than at the outset, that topical expression of Sainte-Beuve: "He produces his great effects by marvellously combining ordinary methods."

After he entered upon this style, essentially more pictorial, his craft progressed without pause. It might be said, in a certain sense, — that is to say, in relation to technical qualities, — that his last pictures, if they have not the same frankness of impression, and the same vivacity of effect as his first work, are yet the best, and for this final form of his talent he owed much to Corot. Doubtless this evolution may be explained by the essential remark, that Fromentin, dating from a certain time, painted only from memory, with the thoughtful liberty of a man who is living upon a fund which he has laid up within himself, and is refining his methods to the last degree.

I will also remark that, in the studies of Fromentin, a decidedly personal tendency is developed after the year 1861, — I mean his very great love for horses. The horse plays a more and more frequent part in his compositions, — an elegant horse, an aristocratic horse, a blood horse, of proud and spirited mien, possessing his own poetry and language. Fromentin's horse has always interested me.

He is never insignificant, nor even commonplace. It can be understood from his movements, from his glance, from the variety of his form, and the coloring of his coat, that he was painted by a friendly hand. However, in spite of his profound knowledge of the horse, — I mean the Arabian horse, which he sought in its own home, and rendered in its own surrounding, — it is perhaps in the very difficult drawing of this animal, and in its essential anatomy, that the insufficiency of Fromentin's first studies are most visibly perceived. Moreover, if we may believe the testimony of one of his comrades in the studio, Alex. B., who had worked with him at the riding-school, at the same time as Pils, then painting *The Passage of the Alma*, it must be noted that Fromentin has drawn the horse oftener and better from memory or intuition — I was going to say from *chic* — than from nature. This does not surprise me. During the whole course of his painter's career, it can be said that the horse was for him the object of a continuous and often deceptive struggle. His intimate communications and his letters often bear the trace of it. He was bitterly irritated by the obstacles he met with in this more than in anything else. I will only cite in proof a letter from La Rochelle, September, 1874, to M. Charles Busson, the landscape painter, one of his best friends, which I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of giving almost wholly, all the more because a few notes of rather keen discouragement throw a curious light upon the little known side of his artist nature, and tend to confirm what I said before: —

Saint Maurice, Sept. 18.

Pardon me, dear friend, I have never so neglected you before. It is true that I never have for a whole month led such a life. However, your very sad letter demands an immediate response. It afflicted me greatly, and I have said nothing about it to you. For this especially I blame myself. Had I known you were perfectly happy, I should reproach myself less. Have you at least recovered your courage?

Two studies are failures, you say. In the first place, are they really so?

Remember that from a picture ruined two or three times you made your very best work, and, instead of a dead failure, achieved a very great success. May it not be the same with your attempts which, for the moment, seem to be spoiled? And then, even if they were wholly ruined, you still have two months, perhaps three, which gives you full time to recover yourself, to make new studies, and to succeed in them. Do not ask too much of yourself, and let the picture for the Salon serve you as a support, without rendering you too exacting. It ought to reassure, not trammel, you. Tell me, if you have not lost all your friendship for your friend, where you are now in the matter.

As for me, dear friend, I have hammered away. I have done only that all day, and every day. Except a trip to La Rochelle, and three visits to my parents, and the few moments given, away from home, to Armand, I have not ceased to belong to my work. This letter is the very first I have written since my arrival. A simple detail will give you an idea of how I employ my time.

I had, you know, *Euloge* and an Arab horse. I have worked at them both, unfortunately, without much method, — learning everything, and studying nothing profoundly. So that, after having worked hard, very hard, I, too, am dissatisfied with myself. I am scarcely any further advanced than before in the exact knowledge of my animal. It is a world to study. I have hardly begun, not to render him, but to understand his proportions; and as to the knowledge of the details most necessary to his simple construction, I do not

know the first word. Perhaps the sole use of the numerous studies or sketches that I am bringing home is to have changed my light and my studio, so as to have at Paris under my eyes, to sustain and guide me, something which, in its aspect, may slightly recall nature.

In one more month I could certainly learn what I wish to know. But that month I have not. We leave next Friday. It must all be begun over again next year, if I live, and am not too old. I have gained from this truly difficult but attractive practice a taste for study: that is the most decided benefit I have derived from it. I shall send *Euloge* home in three days. I am obliged, to my great regret, to attend to selling *Salem*, for I do not know what to do with him, and then we break up.

To tell the truth, I am tired, and I need to rest at Paris. What a curious vacation! I expected better of it. It is not for lack of assiduity, of effort, or of continual labor, that I have not gained more from it. But you know I am but a poor copyist. What I do not know I do not see. I render much better what I divine than the objects I examine. The result is, that my real studies are detestable. I shall discover, perhaps, in a month or two, that, unconsciously, I have learned. Let us hope it.

But this is too much for me. It is half-past ten. I leave you to go to bed; for at night I drop with fatigue, like a workman after a task which begins early. EUGÈNE F.

The very numerous drawings of horses which appeared at his posthumous sale bear still better testimony to his efforts. Their movement is always extremely truthful. The better half of the painted studies he has left were also studies of horses. There was a notable series of them, some of the finest quality, bearing the date of 1874 (Nos. 43 to 63 in the catalogue of the sale): I have every reason to think that they are the studies made at La Rochelle. I cannot leave these horses without quoting that fine passage of the "Sahel" on the

Arabian horse: "Gentle and brave creature! The moment the rider places his hand upon his neck to seize the mane his eye kindles, and a quiver is seen to run along his limbs. Once in the saddle, with bridle in hand, a man does not need to make him feel the spur. He shakes his head a moment, makes the copper or silver of the harness ring, and throws back his neck, which swells in a proud curve. Then look! how he rises, bearing his rider with those grand movements of the body given to equestrian statues."

The Salon of 1861 displayed one of the best equestrian pictures by Fromentin, — *Horsemen returning from a Fantasia;* and one of his most curious ones, with regard to its singular choice of colors, — the *Courriers of the Country of the Ouled-Nayls in the Spring.* Of this we give a reproduction. It is the second plate of our poor friend Jules Jacquemart. At the same time he exhibited *Shepherds on the High Plateau of Kabylie,* — an austere and melancholy scene met with on the road from Medeah to Boghar; the *Bed of the Wady Mzi;* the graceful canvas called *Turkish Houses at Mustapha in Algiers;* and *An Ancient Mosque at Tebessa.*

In 1863 he gave us the calm and melancholy picture of *An Arabian Camp at Daybreak,* in which the horses smoking under the frosty morning sky, give so clear a perception, by an admirably observed detail, of the stern severity of a nomadic life; the *Arab Falconer,* one of his most brilliant small works; and *Falcon Hunting in Algeria.* He has often repeated, in oil, water-color, and crayon, that bold falconer who courses the steppe at the full speed of his horse. In 1864 he had but one picture at the Salon, but it was one

of his most touching works in its expressive poetry, — *A Windstorm in the Plains of Alfa.* The Khamsin, that fatal wind against which the traveller has no other resource than to fold himself in his bournous and lie on the ground, rages around three travellers surprised by the whirlwind; the mournful resignation of the horses, the affright of the men, whose garments cover their heads like a shroud, all concur to produce a terrible impression. This drama of the wind on the plains of Alfa is a good companion-piece for the *Edge of an Oasis during the Sirocco.* Equally energetic as a conception, it is an almost equally beautiful painting.

The picture of the *Arab Falconer* belongs to M. Lepel-Cointet. Its magnificent coloring has for a dominant tone a poppy red, — that pure red, "hardly to be expressed by the palette, made more fiery by the sun, and rendered more intensely ardent by irritating contrasts." We reproduce his crayon sketch of it. The *Falcon Hunt in Algeria*, known also under the name of *The Quarry*, belongs to the Museum of the Luxembourg. The etching of Laguillermie, drawn wholly from the picture, is most remarkable. It recalls the sharp, precise manner — well cut into the copper, and clear and elegant — of the fine engravers of the eighteenth century. I doubt if it would be possible to better render the freshness and delicacy of Fromentin's brush. In this typical picture — one of the best composed of all the work of this master — gleam the greens of the emerald, the grays of the opal, and the blues of the sapphire. The superb horse in the foreground, of immaculate whiteness, is full of fire, and of purest blood. In the South I have met an example

of this wonderful coat, in which everything is white, or rose color, — the mane, the feet, the eyes, and the mouth. It was the most beautiful animal I ever saw. It belonged to Si-Ali-Bey, then Cadi of Tuggurt.

The great *Heron Hunt*, from the collection of the Duc d'Aumale, burst like a firework upon the Salon of 1865, with the less noticeable picture of the *Night Robbers in the Sahara.* The *Heron Hunt* forms a companion-piece to the *Falcon Hunt* of 1874, which figured at the last sale of M. Laurent Richard. These two hunts merit their celebrity in an equal degree. They match each other, — by the same dimensions of canvas; the same importance of a sky loaded with transparent vapors and luminous silky clouds, like carded wool; the same low horizon; the same feeling of extent, depth, and air; the same gayety of aspect and limpidity of execution, woven into the play of values of the rarest quality; the same balance; the same nobility in the composition of a thoroughly known landscape, exact, real, striking, and yet invented; the same palette; the same clearness in a light shining like silver, with those insensible gradations of tone which recall Claude and Turner. As M. Charles Timbal, in his article in "Le Français" on the "Exhibition of Fromentin's Works," perfectly expressed it: "The painter's manner is displayed in all its freshness. It is impossible to unite in truer harmony the water, sky, and horizon." To those young painters who disdain the smiles of nature, the study of such skies might be proposed as an eternal example.

I pass rapidly by the pictures of 1866 (*A Nomadic Tribe Marching towards the Pastures of the Tell*, a masterpiece of anima-

tion and light, and *A Pond in the Oasis*), also by those of 1867 (the *Negro Mountebanks*, and the *Women of the Ouled-Nayls*, being only repetitions) to come to those of 1868, when Fromentin exhibited *Arabs attacked by a Lioness*, a canvas which rendered with a fine feeling for nature one of the wild gorges of the Aurès; and his most discussed work, *Male and female Centaurs practising Archery.*



To many excellent minds the *Centaurs* seem a mistake. A regretted critic, Grangedor, in the report of the Salon for the "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," was at once on the alert. He feared that Fromentin,

while seeking to escape the commonplace, had produced a laboriously mannered work, which was out of harmony with the frankness of his mind and the lofty reserve of his talent. For me the *Centaurs* are the very much to be respected and interesting effort of a painter who, in his art, sinned more from excess than from lack of ambition. Fromentin was only a *genre* painter, but he would have been glad to be an historical painter. Having superior gifts for the composition of a picture, he always dreamed of passing from real life and anecdotes to ideal life and the epic. The divine afflatus perhaps would have failed him, or rather, instead of the afflatus, certain means of execution that are acquired only by long and painful studio work; for instance, study from the nude. He felt it, though he never admitted himself conquered. If he had lived longer, perhaps he would have succeeded in this direction towards which he incessantly aimed. His ambition was, after all, legitimate; for no one can deny that, as a *genre* painter, he has displayed, with regard to composition, weight of line, gesture, and passionate expression, picturesque sentiment and style, the rarest qualities of the historical painter. The picture of the *Centaurs* belongs to M. Alexandre Dumas. The latter has no reason to regret its acquisition. It is rather a difficult work, of quite complicated signification, of rather pale coloring, but very delicate as a whole, very curious in many parts, and of very fine execution. The figures are a third the size of nature. Male and female centaurs are disporting in a green landscape, whose spring-tinted foliage forms a curtain of tender color, against which the outlines are clearly defined. A soft but bright

light animates the whole picture. The group of women in the foreground on the left seems to me to be the most successful part; but I do not very much care for the caprice which has given them the white cruppers of colts and the auburn hair of women: the effect is eccentric. But what delicious detail! what accents full of grace and originality! The female centaur, seen from the rear, the study of which, in black pencil, we reproduce, is excellently modelled.

Perhaps the allegorical origin of the picture can be seen in that plastic passage of the last pages of the "Sahel": "The gallop of a well-mounted horse is still a unique spectacle, as is every equestrian exercise performed to display, in their moments of common activity and accord, the two most intelligent and finished creatures in form that God has made. Separate them, and it might be said that each one of them is incomplete; for neither of them has any longer his maximum of power: couple them, mingle the man with the horse, give to the torso originality and will, give to the rest of the body the combined attributes of promptness and vigor, and you have a being of sovereign force, thinking and acting, courageous and rapid, free and controlled. Greece imagined nothing grander or more natural. She has shown in this that the equestrian statue was the last word of human sculpture; and of the monster of true proportions, which is the audaciously represented alliance of a robust horse and a handsome man, she has made the educator of her heroes, the inventor of her sciences, the most agile of preceptors, the bravest and handsomest of men."

Fromentin cared greatly for this work, made in the maturity of

his talent. He explained this voluntarily to his friends. The human form, which he had always painted clothed or draped, attracted him irresistibly; and he wished to prove to himself that he could escape from the rather narrow circle, where success, and, let us add, his marvellous aptitudes, had enclosed him: an attempt full of dangers and mortifications, but most generous. He had a resolute soul, and the hope of a long future. Alas! it was a dream without a morrow; death was watching him amid his noblest ardor. It is well known that he returned many times to the same subject. Another picture of male and female Centaurs, of still freer execution, was found at his posthumous sale. The same subject was to figure on the panels ordered by Prince Demidoff. The charming studies of a naked woman, dead and stretched upon the ground, entitled in the catalogue the *Conflagration*, were destined for a picture of the same kind, which he had no time to complete. One of them, bought back by Madame Fromentin, a very small sketch in the scale of silver grays, is ravishing.

Now, examining the career of the painter with coolness, and taking into account his temperament, more delicate than robust, better fitted to gather honey like the bee than to labor in a rough furrow, is it not permissible to say that he would have exhausted his forces in this attempt, without great profit for his repose and his renown? The good La Fontaine tells us that one must never force his genius. This feeling for grand things, and this taste for the large horizons of art, displayed themselves in his love and respect for the old masters. His opinions with regard to style were uncompromising. I can give, for instance, a long and curious letter that he wrote from Saint

Maurice to his young friend the painter Humbert, the author of the *Delilah* of the Salon of 1873. It concerned a *Judith*, a sketch of which the latter had submitted to him. This letter is very interesting in form and in thought: —

SAINT MAURICE, Sept. 6, 1872.

Pardon me, dear friend, for having made you wait for my reply a few days longer than I ought. You ask me for a most important opinion, and the interest that you attach to it embarrasses as much as it honors me. I cannot be silent, since you beg me to speak; and, on the other hand, I do not wish, under a pretext of advice, to discuss a project which I have not before my eyes, to substitute my manner of seeing for your own, and to hamper the free conception of your work. All that I can do is to agree with you about its delicate character, and to indicate to you the standpoint from which I would undertake it, and where I should especially try to continue, during the whole course of its execution. It is a very beautiful subject, but very delicate. This is agreed. You feel as I do its resources, its charms, and its dangers. The difficulty arises at the moment when the literary spirit takes possession of it, and, the situation not sufficing, you pretend to make of it a symbol. It increases with all the shades which you propose to put into it, — attitudes, gestures, physiognomy, and expression. If you carry your analysis thus far, do not deceive yourself; that which for the romancer undertaking to write the scene, or the actress undertaking to represent it, would be a great and perilous problem, becomes a pitfall where the cleverest would lose his footing. Consider, on the other hand, that the local color which you will not deny yourself, the luxury of raiment, the undress of the woman, the atmosphere of the tent, the man asleep in the half light, in a word, the surroundings of this personage, — becoming more equivocal as the sentiment which they express becomes more subtle and confused, — consider, I say, that this dramatic situation may give to your subject the false appearance of a gallant adventure, or of a chamber tragedy, which is neither according to the spirit of the work nor to historical truth. For, in fact, Judith is neither a



WOMAN OF THE TRIBES BEARING A BURDEN.

Fac-simile of a pencil drawing by Eugène Fromentin.

Delilah nor an Omphale. There mingles with the memory of her deed not only the bloody catastrophe which elevates it, but the idea of sacrifice, and the predetermination to surrender herself for a holy purpose. If you would absolutely produce a symbolism with your brush, and make of your work a true and instructive myth, this is the signification which you must give it: a woman devoting herself to a mighty cause; a victim offered for the safety of a people; a sort of daughter of Jephthah, or Iphigenia, yielding her honor in lieu of her life, and whose beauty is but an instrument of vengeance. Represent to yourself a Charlotte Corday, finding Marat in his bed instead of in his bath. Compose the story of these modern heroines, and ask yourself if the tragic does not get the better of the romantic element, and if, into the imagination of the composer, faithful to the spirit of the legend, there could enter anything but the idea of a terrible act, — august in its way, even sacred? There is no question here, I repeat, of the ancient or modern Delilah, nor of the enigmatical and mortal glance of the Jocondas of whom the world is full, for its delight and its despair. These are very exceptional circumstances in which the woman has found herself, — weighted with special responsibilities, and clothed with the gravest character.

I may be mistaken, but in any case examine and verify, and if it be thus, you will see that the morality of the subject becomes quite another thing, and that it can only gain in truth or nobility from being treated in the most austere, the grandest, and most tragic style.

Now, I will not conceal from you that this singularly noble rendering alarms me a little for the nervous, living, dramatic spirit of a modern painter. Little by little the brazen cord will relax; and I can foresee in what subtle and charming rhythm you will write this page of pure Doric. You will have great success with it; but I would like something more. Am I wrong?

Now, see in your place what I should do.

In the first place I would suppress every mere prettiness; everything that represents luxury. One jewel shining in the shadow, like a sparkle on the necklace in a portrait by Rembrandt, will suffice to make people imagine that your Judith is covered with them.

I would try to find a gesture of *resolution;* one that shows the victim as the offerer of sacrifice, about to strike off an execrable head. Let there be little or no expression. If you found it, it would be a miracle: if you fail, your picture loses ground. Express an attitude, an assemblage of lines, but no *effect;* let light be upon her, shadow upon him; no real chiaroscuro. Let the half light and the draperies lead up to the alcove, and your Judith will have for title, *Dangers of a Successful Adventure.* Leave out all literature; be a painter, and breathe only a love for the grand, the beautiful and the simple. Put and keep yourself in such a condition of soul that the idea will remain very simple, and let the plastic alone inspire you. Do not try to be expressive: your picture can dispense with profound meaning; and in any case it is better that it should have none than to pursue one that is chimerical or doubtful.

Seek not to make of it a *pastiche,*[1] but keep yourself at those heights of perception where all danger of modern interpretation disappears; ask yourself how an Italian of the best period would conceive this picture.

A Venetian would certainly have represented his Judith lightly draped; he would have displayed her in her full relief and brilliancy, — white, large, and plump; the head would have been forgotten, even if he had taken pains with it. The dark-red body of the man in armor would have been divined in the shadow. There would have been a total absence of expression, and entire commonplaceness of attitude. The subject would have become purely plastic; and the plastic itself would have furnished a favorable opportunity to paint two fine works in contrast, — one amber, the other red. The result would be, even in the little surrounding objects, something like a nymph outraged by a Satyr. The figures would be barely clothed; and the picture would be possibly tragic, but assuredly admirably noble, and undoubtedly chaste. As to the Florentines, remember the Judith of old Mantegna, — colossal and solemn, wrapped in her Sibylline draperies; a sort of Clytemnestra, minus the crime.

1 Imitation in the style of several masters.

Amuse yourself with these thoughts; they are perhaps your best guide; and all my phrases can be reduced to this: Beware of the modern; think of Regnault's *Salome*, that you may accomplish its reverse; invoke the antique.

This is long, too long. I read it over, and hesitate to send you this long-drawn argument. Extract from it what you can for your own use; or, if it disturbs or confuses you, throw it at once into the fire, forget it, go to work, and — courage!

One word more. The times are bad; moral sense is very low; public taste astray, if not lost. Let each one of us work to elevate it. It depends upon you, with such a subject, to give a lesson in art, a lesson in style, and a lesson in taste. E. F.

Let us note, in passing, that M. Humbert, doubtless terrified by the mighty shade of Mantegna thus evoked for him, painted, the following year, a *Delilah*, which is an essentially modern picture, somewhat related to the *Salome* of Regnault.

The year 1869 was remarkable. Fromentin sent to the Salon *A Fantasia in Algeria*, and the *Halt of Muleteers*, and was named officer of the Legion of Honor. His Arab Fantasias are the very best of Fromentin's work, — at least, the most masterly part of it. He has drawn from them such spirited effects as only he, with his faculty of keeping in his memory images once received, could attain. Let us turn to the last pages of the "Sahel," and we shall see to what a degree this grand spectacle moved him, and with what suppleness of talent he knew how to express in the same diapason the painted and the written description. In reading these pages, the picture of 1869 can be seen, and, better than the picture, the very scene itself is visible.

"Imagine," he says, "that which can never be revived in these notes, cold as they are in form and halting in phrase; imagine the most impetuous disorder, the most inconceivable swiftness, the utmost radiance of crude color touched by sunshine; picture the gleam of arms, the play of light over all those moving groups, the haïks loosened by the course, the rustling of the wind in fabrics, the flash, fugitive as lightning, of all these shining things, — vivid reds, fiery orange, cold whites, inundated by the grays of the sky, velvet saddles,



saddles of gold, rosettes on the headstalls of the horses, blinders covered with embroidery, breastplates, bridles, and bits wet with sweat or dripping with foam. Add to this luxury of vision for the eye the still more confusing tumult that is heard, — the cries of runners, the clamor of women, the bursting of powder, the terrible gallop of horses rushing at full speed, the clang and click of a thousand sonorous objects, — give to the scene its true frame, that you know so well, — calm and fair, but a little veiled by dust, — and perhaps you will catch a glimpse, amid the pell-mell of action,

joyous as a festival, intoxicating as war, of the dazzling spectacle called an Arabian *Fantasia*." And Fromentin adds, alluding to Delacroix: "This spectacle awaits its painter. One man alone to-day can understand and translate it; he alone has the ingenious fancy, and the power, the audacity, and the right to attempt it." This homage is almost an excess of modesty; and I know no painter, whether Delacroix or Regnault, who could have succeeded better than Fromentin in this difficult translation. Fromentin has accomplished it by grace, lightness, the subtle play of light, the delicate grouping of values, the perfect harmony of the landscape and the figures. This certainly was by no means the worst fashion.

CHAPTER V.



FROMENTIN was at Venice when the news of our first disasters reached him. He returned quickly to Paris to seek his wife and daughter, and retired with them to St. Maurice, where he passed the time of the war, God knows in what sadness and anguish! Fromentin deeply loved his country, and never entirely recovered from this great trial.

The cruel period of 1870–71 brought his work to a pause: it marks in it a new and last phase. The journeys to Venice, Egypt, and Holland outbalanced in his mind, and somewhat effaced from his palette, the memory of his beloved Africa. After the lapse of three years, he reappeared at the Salon with two great views of Venice, — the *Grand Canal* and the *Mole.*

These contributions received only a cold welcome from the press and public. But this was an injustice. Fromentin had seen Venice in a rather leaden and tarnished light, and he had the frankness to thus represent the sunny city of the Doges. I have often been struck by this dreary aspect of the waters and sky, against which rise stiffly the palaces, and the red-roofed houses with long chimneys, their foundations stained green by the waves, in complementary colors. The flaming romances of M. Ziem do a wrong to the true Venice. On the faith of this conventional interpretation, too much is expected, when one lands in that city for the first time, amid the rippling lights and reverberation of noisy tones. For my own part, I know few so strong and frank representations of Venice as she really is — defaced in all her ancient elegance by the injuries of time and man — as these two pictures by Fromentin. I have seen them many times, and their execution appears to me of peculiar decision.

I will rapidly pass over the Salon of 1874, of which I had the honor to render an account in the "Gazette des Beaux-Arts."

I may be permitted to recall what I then wrote concerning one of the two canvases exhibited by Fromentin: —

The *Ravine* will remain in the first rank of his works, among his most complete and brilliant pictures. There reigns in it truly a delicious freshness. What calmness and modesty of effect! In the heart of a noble cliff, dark and ochreous, crowned by a few tufts of mastic and olive trees, opens a large grotto. From the depths of its obscure and transparent shadow, whose undefinable velvet reminds one of a bat's wing, a stream escapes in a thin silver fillet.

Was not Fromentin thinking then of his walks in the neighborhood of Blidah and Wad el Khebir?

"The little river takes its rise," he says, "at the bottom of a narrow ravine of no great depth, and, like all rivers mountainous in their origin, it is surprised at first in a smiling cradle beneath a rock hung with foliage, twigs, and oleanders. It is born there in the freshness of shade, in retreat and silence, like thoughts in the peaceful brain of a recluse. The mountain is rocky, steep, and often hollowed by great land-slides. Few trees are seen upon it, except here and there some old olive-trees, planted horizontally in the slope."

Is not this the whole picture in half a dozen lines?



The Salon of 1876, which was the last, transports us into Egypt. *The Nile* and the *Souvenir of Esneh* were judged to be rather dreary in execution.

It seems indeed as if a sad presentiment brooded over these works. The painter's hand is always alert and supple; but the smile of his

enthusiastic years is veiled. The color seems as if it were stifled by a neutral scale of violet tints. And yet what grand poetry there is in this great river flowing with its slimy waters between its flat low shores! What nobility in this group of crouching women!

It is to be remarked, moreover, that the scenes noted by his pencil in Egypt furnished him with matter for delicious compositions. From this point of view few of his pictures are worth more than his Egyptian canvases.

What more balanced play of light can be found than in his *Barges on the Nile?* what greater vividness in true impression of gesture, movement, and rhythmic accent than the *Sakki on the Borders of the Nile*, of which we give the pen sketches? what more charming grouping of figures than that in the *Town on the Borders of the Nile*, where the fellahs are pulling at the ropes of a barge to drag it up the stream? what more delicious in outline and clearness of style, or more concise in execution, than that gem entitled *Bac on the Nile*, dated 1871? This little picture, with the preceding, are the two which most impressed me at the exhibition on the Quai Malaquais. An Arab in the foreground is relieved against the gray of a uniform sky, lighted by the uncertain gleam of the rising sun; he is mounted upon a camel, seen in profile; beside him are two fellahs standing; afar off, in the mist, a boat. Fromentin has rarely drawn with such fine touch. This perfect work belongs to M. Landon.

I do not know what these last pictures will become, painted as they are in an atmosphere of slaty purple, — whether they will in the

end grow black, or if they will remain as they are; but it is certain that they merit the high price set upon them by collectors.

The years 1871, 1872, and 1873 were the grand climacteric in Fromentin's manner of painting. To me this is the crowning point of his talent. He seems to have rediscovered the firmness, precision, and crystalline brilliancy of his early painting, and to have added to it the transparency and fluidity of color, and the lightness of glazing, that we admire in *Heron Hunting*. At this time he conceived the plan of an important picture, the *Rhamadan*, for which unfortunately he painted only detached sketches. All these sketches passed into the hands of M. Verdé-Delisle; but they were dispersed at his death. They were studies of draped figures, seated or standing, almost all in the attitude of prayer. The color was of a fine golden tone, which took on a glaze immediately. I consider them paintings of very rare quality.

I have only gleaned from the extensive work of Fromentin. Many other productions deserve to be noticed here; but I will content myself with citing the *Wandering Tribe crossing a Ford* (1869), belonging to M. Isaac Pereire; the enchanting *Halt of Muleteers* (1872), belonging to M. Lepel-Cointet; *Arabs watering their Horses at a Spring in a Ravine* (1874); *Kabyl Shepherd leading his Sheep; Arabs attacked by a Lioness; Arabian Women Travelling*, subtle as a Wouwerman, belonging to M. Alfred Mame; and especially that superb picture, of such poignant energy in its burning tones, — the fiery furnace wherein men and beasts writhe stretched upon the ground, — known by the name of the



A YOUTH OF EL AGHOUAT.

Fac-simile of a pencil sketch of Eugène Fromentin.

Land of Thirst, which was painted, if I am not mistaken, in 1869. Sternness and intensity of effect are pushed to the utmost extreme in this last canvas. The breath of mortality which broods over this flaming plain, the gray vultures circling in the air awaiting their prey, the horrible convulsions of the unhappy wretches tortured by thirst, the very gleam of the light which radiates and sings of death with sonorous and menacing rhythm, — all recall to me certain ghastly melodies in Berlioz's "Requiem." Fromentin produced nothing more vigorous.

I will recall, finally, his last project for a picture, the *Conflagration*, — one of the painted studies for which is a very delicate bit of anatomy.

To sum up, as I have before said, the painter in Fromentin was rather a harmonist than a colorist, — that is, he rather sought agreements than contrasts. We have seen him oscillating between Marilhat, Decamps, and Delacroix, to finally fix upon Corot, — the harmonist *par excellence*. I will also add that the refinements of coloring and execution of his neighbor and friend, M. Gustave Moreau, — adept in the skill of another man of refinement, Gustave Ricard, — did not leave him indifferent; and it would be easy to discover positive traces of it in his methods. Like Moreau's, Fromentin's palette is rich in the most delicate and the most precious tones, which his pencil excels in making sparkle by juxtaposition. Also, in his, as in M. Moreau's work, color is not too manifest: time will make it more vivid by toning; but it will always remain tender and clear, which is one of the first conditions of duration. In spite

of all that; in spite of the influences which traverse his work; in spite of the joint in his armor from his tardy, brief, and untechnical education, — Fromentin is not an artist whose inspiration comes from others. He assimilates: he never imitates. His feeling is wholly and incontestably original. He is Fromentin; and his name alone suffices to awaken the memory of all the qualities which assuredly will make him live in the first rank of the painters of his time.

Fromentin worked without relaxation; and his productiveness was most fruitful, even too fruitful; for he made duplicates for sale which were sent to the four corners of the world, and were rarely so good as the original works. It would be impossible to give a complete list of his pictures, — he sold many from hand to hand to foreign merchants; but I think I have omitted no important work. As to his drawings, made from nature, which were seen together at the posthumous sale, I have already said what I think of their truth of impression and extreme sincerity. The best and most numerous result from his second sojourn in Africa (Mustapha, Blidah, and El Aghouat, 1863).

The influence of Fromentin upon the school of contemporary painting, without having been very marked or very apparent, has been none the less important and continuous. His words, his counsels, and his encouragement, as well as his example, have had a lively influence upon a group of young and intelligent artists, whom he took under his patronage. Kind and indulgent as he was in intimate relations, he could at the same time be very persuasive, and it is incontestable that he directed the first efforts of a little school of

elevated tendency, which he conducted and sustained in the way of success. MM. Henry Lévy, Humbert, Cormon, Thirion, Huguet, and some others also, owe much to him. His disappearance left a void among them which cannot be filled. Likewise the jury of the Salon lost in him one of its most active and enlightened members.

Fromentin had very marked personal ideas, as well upon the organization of exhibitions as upon the movement of contemporary art; and, if he had lived longer, there is no doubt that he would have expressed them with all the authority given by the renown of his pen. He even wrote upon this subject to the administration of the Beaux-Arts a letter, the frankness and vigorous expressions of which touched some people's susceptibilities.

He thought for a long time of expressing his views upon the æsthetics of modern art; and this intention is shown in many passages of the "Sahara," the "Sahel," and the "Old Masters of Belgium and Holland;"[1] but as he always maintained great reserve in his active and exterior manifestations, he never decided to break silence.

Once, however, in the month of March, 1864, he did have a project for a public lecture upon this delicate matter. The project was not realized; but there resulted from it divers important fragments found among his papers. This manuscript, unfortunately never finished, has for title "A Critic's Programme." I think that some of these fragments will be read with great interest; nothing that Fromentin has written, even a sketch like this, being a matter of indifference.

[1] Les Maîtres d'Autrefois.

There will be found in it the essential part of his thoughts upon what might be called the Republic of Arts in France.

However, although I judge them worthy of the literary memory of Fromentin, and consequently worthy of publication, I recognize the unfinished and fragmentary character of these extracts, which lack the final revision of the author.

The first lines strike a note characteristic of the complex temperament of Eugène Fromentin, — I mean the very essence of his criticism on art matters, — an extreme boldness, and entire frankness "towards ideas," allied to a great respect for persons. The reputation achieved by the "Old Masters of Belgium and Holland" results largely from the very liberty of its judgments. On the other hand, if Fromentin never wrote of the Salon, — a task he would have performed as no one else could, — the reason must be sought for in his almost excessive tenderness for people's feelings.

A CRITIC'S PROGRAMME.

Gentlemen, — The very title of this conversation should reassure you. If it is vast, it is at least very circumspect. It permits the asking of many questions without precisely obliging us to solve them. It excludes the technicalities of things, and only touches upon their moral qualities. It authorizes a general and rapid survey of what is thought, loved, and done in art, and of what is written on the subject, and yet it does not lead to the perilous examination of productions. It also suppresses the real difficulty, — that of citing names and judging works. You need not then fear that I shall impose upon your convictions, your sympathies, or your personal friendships, whatever they may be, the least constraint or the slightest annoyance. We are not about to begin one of those irritating processes which have been undergone

too often in the last thirty years, — which oppose schools, involve persons, embarrass systems, contest renown, and whose gravity would produce great embarrassment for you and me. We meet to-night to examine together, with due respect for individuals and the greatest boldness with regard to ideas, into the spirit, the habit, the point of view of contemporary criticism, when applied to the study of the plastic arts, — in order to discover the real state of our opinions upon this subject.

I.

And, to begin with, have we opinions? This is a question, gentlemen, from which our self-love need not suffer, if we remember that the beginning of all knowledge and all wisdom is to perceive that we know nothing. Have we opinions? I ask. I mean by that, well-reasoned, sensible opinions, — armed for quarrel, capable of defending themselves with good reasons, of pursuing error under the thousand disguises of prejudice, of grappling with the truth and pointing to it, wherever it can be found. These opinions, moreover, which need, in order to be properly developed, a happy sensitiveness, served by wide culture; this decision influenced by things of the most delicate and lofty order; this competence to solve certain problems which divide or discourage, as you know, the most consummate craftsmen; in a word, this individual half-certainty which it has been agreed to call doctrine, — who has made it for us? I ask. Where have we found it? Who inspired it? Who was its guide? And would it not be a miracle, on the other hand, if the public were in possession of a body of doctrine when its natural instructors have so little?

Let us go to the foundation of things; let us establish facts as they are; let us pierce through appearances; and, even if it fills us with grief, let us disguise nothing.

Appearances are seductive. France possesses a large number of artists, — a very great number. I will not try to estimate this number for fear of terrifying you by the enormous amount of a production of which the regular,

almost continual flow constitutes in itself an extremely curious problem in political economy. Viewed as a whole, with the relative homogeneousness which comes from its French spirit, this mass of talent gives us on the surface a very real ascendency. From its numerical importance, as well as by its originality and true merits, our school holds to-day the first rank in the world. Who then would dare to deny it, since facts prove it? At a recent gathering — why may I not say, at the last London exhibition — France must have voluntarily depreciated herself, or have been very modest, to allow ideas so contrary to the truth to have been conceived concerning her uncontestable artistic worth. This mistake, moreover, — which only proves once more that modesty often risks being taken at its word, — this brief misconception is not of the least importance. Our French school is what it is, — numerous, active, relatively brilliant, sending its rays afar; since all over the globe it is imitated, studied, anxiously considered and adhered to, while everybody seeks to be incorporated with it; I will add that it is envied, which is one of the sure signs of strength.

At home the situation is no less good. The public and the artists seem in harmony on many points. If the latter, as I repeat, produce enormously, the public has insatiable needs; and the mechanism of this industrial fact is such that nowhere, except with short and temporary exceptions, is a surfeit perceived. Thanks to the liberal tax levied every year upon the budget of your fancies, every one lives, or *almost* lives; and if this "almost," gentlemen, conceals here, as elsewhere, much suffering and deplorable misery, ought we to accuse ourselves of a misfortune, which may be one of the very laws of emulation, one of the necessities of life? The greater part prosper; some attain riches; a certain number will finish their career in opulence. Means of exhibiting abound: they are diverse, of every kind, and so regular that there is no longer, it may be said, any interruption in this continual current of business, or sympathy, which puts minds or interests into communication. Wherever there is any gap, it is filled. What the government's influence is not sufficient to accomplish, others finish. And as in this division, however equal, of favors, of publicity or of honors, there are always found imperfections, or forget-

fulness, or clashing of interests, or impatient ambitions, nothing being perfect in this world, you see there are also found ingenious speculators, or rather, sufficiently enterprising philanthropists, to dream of and to attempt the perfecting of a system of exhibitions, already very complex. We may call these places of publicity markets, if we are talking business; if we change our point of view, we may name them centres of influence or instruction. Let us state, in any case, that very little is wanting to the methods of publicity of which artists can make use; and that in this relation their situation may well excite the envy of men of letters and musicians.

Consider that the newspapers are at their mercy. Every annual exhibition is a solemnity, a festival for the mind, we are repeatedly told, of which they all take possession, from the smallest to the greatest, from the lightest to the most serious, to discourse for six months to the whole world of the paintings that France has produced during the current year. Very few works escape this minute investigation of everything which bears the mark of even an approach to excellence. Very few of us are deprived of the sweetness of passing from mouth to mouth, and being immortalized. Ephemeral renown, it may be; but of what is true renown composed, if not of a little or a great deal of good report which is renewed and at last endures? Works are reproduced profusely, and all the methods of modern industry seem to have been created to serve as agents for the prodigious circulation of a single work, — multiplied almost as frequently as a book. Even this does not suffice; and that reproduction may be, if not more complete, at least more striking, it even adopts literary forms. Writers of merit, of great talent, of consummate art, complaisantly become copyists of the worst of painters, and, for some reason which I have never quite been able to understand, devote all the care of a skilful pen to imitations which sometimes do great honor to the originals. We have public or half-public exhibitions, private exhibitions, sales of pictures, decorative labors in churches and monuments, — is there one circumstance, one incident, which is not made profitable; one place that is neglected, except perhaps a single one, the Museum of the Louvre? But we will return to this, for so grave an omission must have a reason.

Gentlemen, and Public, do you not think that it would be very exacting to ask of us more than we give? If the zealous intermediaries of whom I just now spoke are eager to point out to us works or names, do we display a less great eagerness in welcoming them? We have certainly instincts of art and inclinations of taste which, it is said, make our country a place, and our epoch a rare time, for the expansion of beautiful ideas. These instincts are large enough to exclude nothing, and exact enough to give us preferences. We have a generous curiosity for all works of the mind; a sensuousness of eye which makes us like painted canvases and sends us rushing in crowds to the places where they are exhibited, as we do to agreeable or touching spectacles, according to the nature or degree of interest which they inspire. There are among us many *dilettanti* and impassioned amateurs. Our whole epoch has even, we may say, an enlightened air of amateurishness quite sufficient to produce illusions, but which must be examined closely in the conscientious scrutiny that I shall dare presently to ask from each of you.

We encourage, we applaud, we watch from the beginning half-revealed talents, saluting them as if they were gospel truth. There is even in our time with regard to rising painters a sort of unanimity of hope and satisfaction which did not always exist, — far from it, — that does not exist in the same degree in certain cognate arts, and of which the sole defect is perhaps its resemblance to the amiability of indifference.

However that may be, gentlemen, — whether it be conviction or indifference, a success of esteem or a success of politeness, — the result, at least in form, is the same from the moment that it amounts to a success for the artists.

They are applauded, recompensed, honored: a few disagreeable old prejudices are being dissipated; the opinion of the world is rather more just; there is a clearer sense of the honor due to efforts of the intelligence; there is a better appreciation of the character of a profession which is the most liberal of all, — in fact independent, and consequently exempt from many despicable little servitudes. The grave responsibility of such struggles, the severity of the discipline, the isolation in effort, the secret joys of study, as well as

its unknown sorrows; finally, the grandeur, even if a little chimerical, of the aim, — doubtless all these, being better understood, concur in justly raising in the public estimation this race of visionaries, who cannot be, believe me, too highly honored, nor are they much to be pitied.

Some of them, in those vicissitudes of success of which the history deserves to be written, for it would be profoundly instructive, have the swift and fugitive brilliancy of meteors, — a comparison much used in such cases, which I may be permitted to employ in this connection. They come we know not whence; they disappear, we know not why. Whose the fault? it is asked. The public, astonished at their brief duration, is for a moment anxious for the secret of these rapid existences. Then another arises who makes it forget them; and heaven knows, gentlemen, into what depths have plunged those sorrowful and unjustly scorned beings known as fallen stars. Others seem to traverse a long series of cloudy nights: their existence is suspected; they are not seen. Years pass in this strange obscurity, which does not depend upon themselves, until some day our troubled sky suddenly clears, and shows us the brilliant gleam of a talent of the first order in the full blaze of light, only awaiting that attention from human minds which is the creator of glory.

In spite of those accidents which I confine myself to indicating to you in passing, without seeking for proofs, the fact I wish to establish just now is, that a nearly satisfactory equilibrium reigns between the artists and the public. From a material point of view, their interests are in accord. The taste for the arts is expanding, and it increases in proportion to the multiplied needs of production. Both sides agree to raise the price; transactions are made on such new conditions that buyers and sellers are astonished; and, what is peculiar, every one's self-love seems to be gratified by it. From the moral point of view, I know no conflict between the taste of those who appreciate and the fancy of those who create. There is a reciprocal influence, a movement of mutual reaction, the common atmosphere we all breathe is impregnated with the same ideas; the same currents of fashion direct us, above all there is a general need of listening to each other, understanding each other.

and giving each other pleasure; there exist a spirit of conciliation appropriate to a weary epoch, and a certain urbanity of manner which is felt even in the freest inspirations of the studio, — why then do not so many permanent or wholly modern causes bring about the most cordial fusion between an almost artistic public and almost worldly artists? It can be said with certainty that our epoch sincerely loves the arts, and particularly painting, thus marking with precision the art upon which we are to discourse. Not only has this been said, but it has been written and proved by the manifestations of an interest always ready, indefatigable, eager, impatient for novelty, sometimes magnificent, often clever, whose very excesses, inspired by simplicity of sentiment, should not on this account be either discussed or condemned by reason.

And yet, gentlemen, do you not find in this fortunate state of prosperity, understanding, and fusion, of which I have traced the picture, something at bottom which does not work perfectly? And do you not perceive here room for certain doubts? These doubts I am about to submit to you.

II.

People complain, and utter recriminations and regrets. They want something better; they ask for something more. It is said that good works are rare; that great ones exist no longer; that talent diminishes in proportion as it multiplies; that the blood of strong schools becomes impoverished in proportion to the increase of their progeny; that characters weaken, consciences become less austere, originality disappears beneath conventionalities; that people are weary of mediocrity, and desire excellence. Then this growing wave of production fills them with uneasiness and terrifies them. They say that curiosity has its bounds; that the sincerest passion for works of the mind needs a time to rest, periods of repose; and that this periodical tide of six or seven thousand pictures, flowing every ten months into the same place, spreading over the same public, will end by submerging the taste for the beautiful, and drowning it in inevitable weariness.

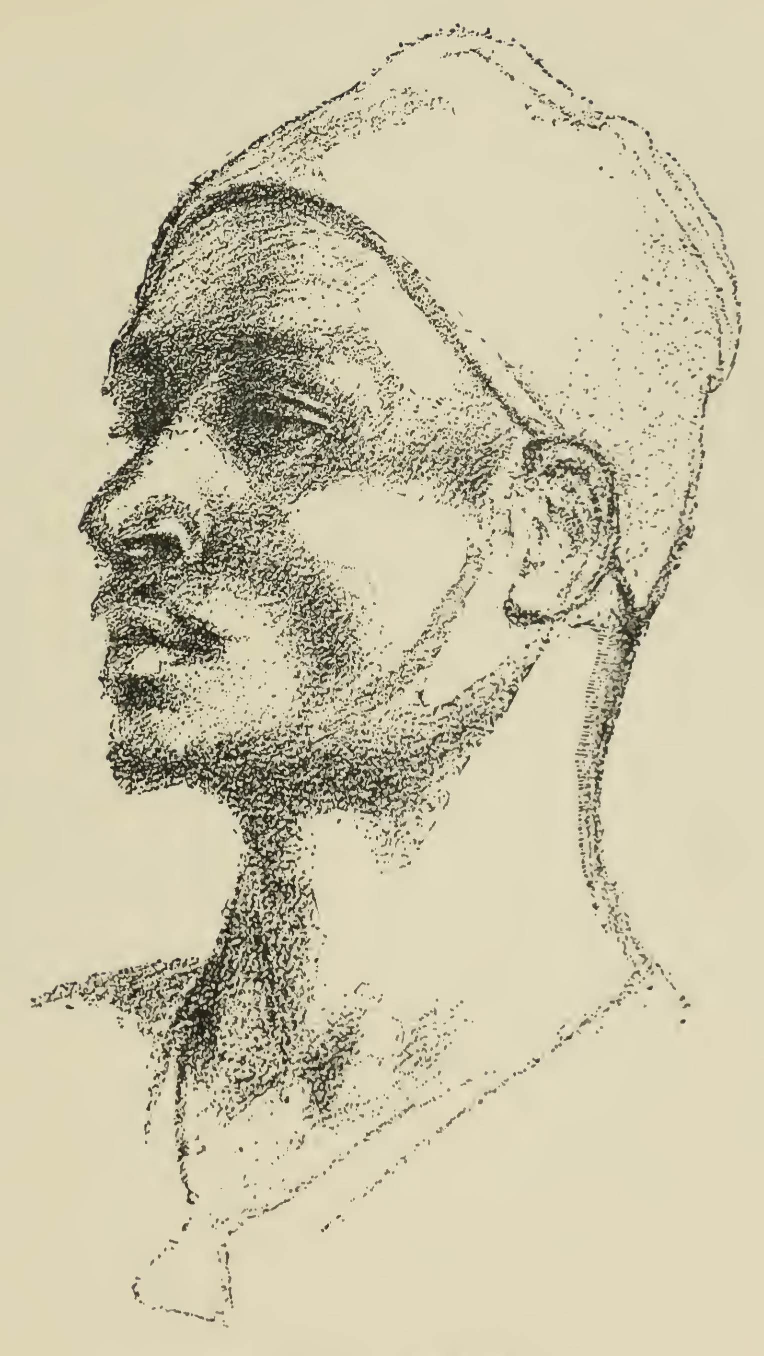
On the other side, they reason thus: We are not free; it is not we who rule

taste; we direct nothing; we are governed. The favors of the public are despotic: we must pay dearly to get them, and more dearly to keep them. No man belongs to himself except while he is unknown. Hardly are you welcomed by the public before you become its slave. Success now-a-days is at bottom but slavery. Be yourself, and who will understand you? Be everybody, and the crowd adopts you, and the men of refinement abandon you. Great works are asked of us, and it is time lost to undertake them: for nothing inspires them; no one believes in them, neither we nor others; and it is but a formula of vain condolence that condemns us to wear mourning for the great and noble habits of painting. Great painting is dead. That is understood. When it returns, mark the funereal effect it produces upon the joviality of the living.

Those who pretend to be delicate are only *blasé*. It is not commonplaceness which displeases: it is everything that bears too vivid a stamp. It is not the best that is wanted: it is the extraordinary. And the extraordinary is the work of those under the effects of hallucination. Painters are not opium-eaters. Of the free methods of production, we shall never have too many; because in such a matter absolute liberty is only a right. We send seven or eight thousand pictures every year to the entrance of a palace which has not been prepared for us, but which is lent us. Three thousand, at the outside, are received. This vast culling out is performed by a tribunal that we do not know, that we did not elect, which does not belong to our age: which has forgotten the ambitions, the ignorance, the intemperance, the manners, and the miseries of youth; which rules taste without understanding that taste may change, and which cheats the future by forgetting that it speaks in the name of the past. We are packed arbitrarily in very poor places. The light is bad, the space too small, the surrounding odious. Bad works extinguish good ones, till the general level is lowered, and the mediocre equality of this confused conglomeration of pictures gives an impression which is enough to disgust one with painting. Over-sensitive talents hesitate to cram themselves into this pitiless place, which seems to undress the pictorial art, and to lay bare only its vileness. Men who respect themselves keep away from

it. The exclusive sulk, and ask themselves if there is no way to create elsewhere a centre more hospitable for new-comers. We want free exhibitions, associations, groups. Let us break up, and create coteries. Let us admit into each group only the talents which esteem each other, understand each other, and render justice to each other. Assembled in this great palace, which becomes a tower of Babel, we make such a chaos that the world sees in it a new confusion of tongues; and this is a misfortune for everybody. Moreover criticism serves us ill, while giving itself much trouble. As an agent of publicity it has merit; as an intermediary between the public and ourselves, it forgets that it is we who create, and that it is the public which should be submissive. It hesitates between the two, representing in turn the ideas of each, and only half-serving the superior interests of art. If any one has a right to influence opinion, to direct it, to lead it, to enlighten it when it is astray, who has this right and this power if not the men who govern it with their pen?

Moreover, they have themselves their passions, their weaknesses, and their temperaments. Some have sorrowful spirits which care for nothing; others are amiable optimists who, loving few things, adopt everything, whose indifferent hand distributes only blame without meaning, or cold caresses; others do nothing but reproduce in written language the expression of sentiments gathered in the obscure hurly-burly of what it is the fashion to call the inexperienced Sunday public. Besides, these are men of letters, having hardly a footing in the studios, and knowing of the secrets of the trade only what can be seen through cracks and keyholes. Is it quite certain that they understand anything at all? And would it not be surprising to see them at the first stroke put their finger on the truths which escape us, and make us agree on the very points of discord which divide us? On this matter, gentlemen, I think that from time to time there rises against this fact a certain pride — curious indeed, but inevitable — which rebels at this guardianship exercised by letters over the plastic arts. If the thing were possible, we should not be sorry to be emancipated, and to vindicate our right to explain ourselves directly to the public. But this problem is one of those that must be abandoned, I think; for



STUDY OF AN ARAB.

Fac-simile of a drawing by Fromentin.

it has presented itself in every age, and I do not see that it has ever been solved.

Such is the least of the wrongs formulated by artists against the destiny which gave them birth in the nineteenth century, that you would know more about if every one exhibited them in writing, or if you only were to read the projects of public reform under their immediate inspiration. They are accused, and they reply. What says the critic in this conflict?

Gentlemen, criticism is much embarrassed, and with very good reason; for, placed upon the boundary which separates the studios from the world, it participates a little in both, and unconsciously must reflect all their contradictions.

It agrees with the public upon the growing weakness of the periodical exhibitions, and consequently upon the lowering of the level. On this subject it has echoed complaints, regrets, exhortations, or reprimands. It rallies artists in a friendly way about their lack of ardor, their want of boldness. It preaches to them virtues which seem not to belong to our age, — disinterestedness, self-abnegation, pure love of labor, and elevated ambition for glory alone. To support its counsels, it invokes great examples and noble memories of a time neither more nor less heroic than our own, but wherein heroism merely affected other forms. There are no great names, no accomplished models, that serious criticism does not judge fitting to quote, to excite the imagination of the young and inspire in them a salutary respect for their origin and their mandate. There is found, behind these wise remonstrances of criticism employed by men of letters, something of the romantic and charming sentiment that was held about 1830 for the positive things of life, — a thirst for struggle, faith in inspiration, forgetfulness of a world seen from afar and from above, — for a taste for studious attics was then the fashion, — and with that a certain scorn of money, and the frank worship, not of comfort, but of mind. All this may be an anachronism to-day; and yet let us not laugh at it. When into our now very different world there returns the memory of an epoch eminently young, worn out before growing aged, which ever wears the bold features of a face but twenty years old, do you not find, gentlemen, that we feel a certain warmth?

Criticism is then right, a thousand times right; and it is not I, gentlemen,

who would blame it for repeating such sensible things. Let it occupy itself with the disappearance of a great art, the most elevated in conception, the most simple in its methods of expression; consequently the most vast in idea, and the most severe in resources. This is the right of every enlightened man who remembers its history and regrets it. But it seeks at the same time the cause of the evil and its remedy. The cause is very remote and distant; the remedies proposed uncertain or radical. For instance, to produce the reawakening of monumental painting, not distinguishing very clearly cause from effect, it would propose to decorate all the white walls of the famous buildings in Paris, thinking itself sufficiently powerful to find arms enough to cover them, and unemployed talent enough to illustrate them. Now, gentlemen, herein lies the difficulty. Is it the opportunity which is lacking to the artists, or are the artists wanting for the occasion? Or is it not rather that the circumstances of the time, our studies, experience, and taste create this distressing dilemma, from which there seems no issue?

As to easel painting critical opinion differs; and this is a point which ranges it on the side of the painters against the public.

It says on this subject to the public one thing, among others, which appears very just. It says: "Build palaces, open galleries. We will find you pictures; but have room, space, encouraging liberality for those who would attempt great pictures; enlarge measures that artists may desire to enlarge their work; lay aside your eye-glasses, and no longer subject the works of very differently gifted hands to being judged with a rigor only applicable to the examination of miniatures."

It permits itself also from time to time to make more weighty observations upon false taste, upon errors, upon license, upon the too complacent reception of a kind of trifling imitated from the preceding century, which has no excuse in this, either in the elegance of costume, the gayety of manners, or the amiable lightness of characters. There is a modesty of feeling, or, if you will, there is a prudishness, that is now offended by it. There are now people less disposed to laugh, whom this factitious lightness affects disagreeably, and who show it plainly.

Apart from these questions of censure upon which decency and common sense generally agree, upon all the others, which are innumerable, criticism is profoundly hesitating or divided, which is not surprising. If one thinks in fact of the difficulty of its intermediary rôle; of the natural idea of conciliation which animates it; of the great number of those who practise it; of the differences of age, birth, purposes, of habits, points of view, society, or cliques which separate them; of the friendships they are subject to or represent; of the literary ideas which influence them: if one takes into account, in a word, its origin, its inspiration, or its attachments, — it will be understood that criticism is simply the interpreter for us all, amateurs, men of taste, men of the world, craftsmen; that by this title it is obliged to reproduce infinitely the multiple and very diverse expression of the ideas of its time; that it has no other opinion than ours; that it adopts without discernment all the interests confided to it; and consequently this so-called tribunal is not one, and it would be very difficult for it to pronounce independently upon a debate that it has not only stated, but argued.

Now, gentlemen, if I am not mistaken, this is what might be said to sum up the situation made for criticism by circumstances, concerning its ambiguous rôle, its limits, and powerlessness, of which the justification is in the facts themselves.

As to the government, has it not a part to play in all this? By its administration, its budgets, its favors, by the protection which attributes to it the rights of guardianship with the duties of patronage, the government has always shown that it means to closely watch the questions which so nearly concern the fate of individuals, or even the honor of our country. It does what it can, and, I will add, what it ought. It organizes, *encourages*, and *recompenses*. Two words, gentlemen, I underline in passing, as possessing capital importance; for they contain the most subtle question of urgency and initiative which has been discussed for a long while. However that may be, government does not await the production of talents to adopt them. It does not wait for men to be made; it lets them be made. It gives to the youngest the means of instruction. There are schools to which there is admission by competition. It cultivates at

its own expense a nursery of young people, with the legitimate intention to form in them a unity of doctrine, with a less well founded hope to obtain from them a chosen few. Fairly, to all it gives ample means to make themselves known, — on conditions, doubtless, but on conditions certainly not very rigorous. At the same time it has its hands full of works, distinctions, and honors. It has pensioners and clients by hundreds, in great numbers, and in all categories, from the humblest to the greatest. Supposing its liberality insufficient, as is pretended, this complaint is one of those which could be instantly obviated by one more cipher in the budget; and the questions which can be thus solved are fortunately the least serious.

Is the government held bound to join to all its duties, the greater part of which are practical, any others? Ought it to undertake the graver duty of interfering in questions, — I will not say of surveillance, or even discipline, but almost of doctrine and conscience, and in a certain way of artistic jurisprudence? Should its duties of patronage extend to controlling the spirit, opinions, and even the instruction and decisions of the sole tribunal which hitherto has had high jurisdiction in these matters?

Gentlemen, quite recent facts, which I have neither the right nor desire to weigh here, would prove that the government feels pledged to go as far as this.

Concerning these facts — which will pass away, and which, though a little disturbing, are not at all alarming, believe me, either for artists or the arts — I will say but a word, the simplest of all, and the only one moreover which I am permitted to say.

Were the debate on its own ground, it would be very simple. We should ask from the high court, which rules us in a measure, which judges and honors us, a little of that eclecticism which enlarges the modern spirit, with a little more zeal also in certain parts of its decision. To require it to belong to its epoch, and to do about what it should do, I know is to ask much in a few words. But indeed the request is just. The administration has so judged it, and has made that request. But how?

Gentlemen, permit me to tell; for every well-expressed question, it is said, is half answered.

If there is resistance, annoyance, and bitterness mingled with debates which should always be exempt from them; if it is so difficult to make truth the result of a conflict sustained on each side with equally strong convictions; if opinion hesitates so greatly that it is borne with singular variations from one side to the other, uncertain, irresolute, defending to-day what it combated yesterday, and detesting the very ones whose support it had invoked, — I think (and are you not of my opinion?) that it is all the result of a simple misunderstanding. Do you not believe that the intention is good, though the reasons given are a little less good; do you think that the school of Rome, for instance, to which are attributed so many benefits or so many hurtful effects, merits in reality either such great honor or such deep reproach? do you not believe that it has an incontestable reason for existence, a relative utility, and is neither all nor nothing, and yet may be for the art of painting what another illustrious school is for the art of speaking, —a means of culture for those who attend it, though not a sanctuary for the exclusion of all those who have not had the honor to belong to it? Well, gentlemen, to continue, I ask you if, after this sole example, you do not believe that on both sides the cause is very just, and can be sustained, though differently; that the two might come to harmony by understanding each other better; and that the truth suffers solely from an error in reasoning, called in rhetoric a paralogism?

As to the question, beyond this passing incident, of knowing whether the government ought to act directly upon taste and doctrine, and, in a word, to inspire art, — gentlemen, this is an administration of souls with which no government that I know of has ever been invested. It seems to me that all powerful men to whom destiny has furnished an enlightened age, from Pericles to ourselves, have been of one mind, — to let things alone, and to regard as a spontaneous favor of their country or their age the harvest of great men which so rich a time prepared for them. Their principle was ours, — to render the soil propitious and wait. The rest concerns no one, except him who chooses that date, or that germ, to make of it the mould of a great epoch or a great artist.

The government is, then, outside the question, at least upon the leading

point which occupies us. It is not for it to make painters: it adopts them. It is not for it to give us taste; but it multiplies the finest examples of it. It is not for it to create great lights: history furnishes some which are not extinguished, and the government focalizes them in a sufficiently visible way for those who know how to see them. Finally, I suppose it is not its business to publish a code for our use; for, gentlemen, we possess institutes, artistic capitularies, or the imperishable collections of painted laws, in the museums, and the gates are closed against no one.

To sum up the matter, I declare and pronounce that under this apparent prosperity there is much discomfort. This harmony of intelligence conceals at bottom profound discord. If the public is unaware of this condition of things, if the artists are innocent of it, if criticism is powerless even to call attention to it, gentlemen, if the government is justified, we must ask ourselves, What is at fault? And I dare to answer, it is our ignorance.

III.

I will suppose an honest artist, relatively enlightened and modest, — such are not rare. I will suppose that you are in his confidence, and that on one of those days when certain moral defects make the conscience clear, and sensitiveness very clairvoyant, this man, slightly disenchanted, has been led to reveal to you the depths of his thoughts. If he is in that condition of sadness and sincerity of which I speak, probably, gentlemen, he will say to you about what I am going to say.

We revolve in a vicious circle. Public taste is injured; that of painters is so no less; and we vainly seek to know which of the two should elevate the other. Sometimes we say that opinion ought to act upon the quality of work, and elevate it; and again, according to a new idea, it must be the works themselves that should act upon opinion, and convert it by good examples. Which is the better of these two ideas? Admitting that one of the two is correct, we must hope for a kind of miraculous purification in the atmosphere of society or in the air of studios. The evil is neither here nor there. We

would be glad if it were local, in order to get at it more easily. The effects produced are manifest: the cause is uncertain. Not knowing where to seize it in its origin, we confine ourselves to combating it in its results, practising thus a method used in therapeutics, which consists in treating a malady according to its symptoms, when in despair of finding a cause for it.

In reality we are all sick with a complaint of long standing, easier to name than to limit, of which the cause is profound, and which, you may be persuaded, is more inherent to the constitution of our times than is imagined. We are children of an emancipated and lawless epoch. We are all — will the acknowledgment be too harsh? — the product of a worthless instruction or a detestable education. . . .

Gentlemen, a very interesting movement was produced in the arts in France forty years ago, — something analogous in a small way to the revolution which occurred thirty years before in institutions, and which you know we have not yet heard the last of. You know the history of this artistic Eighty-nine, which also had its ardor, its struggles, its tempests, its pettiness, and great glory; which on the day of its triumph baptized itself with an ill-chosen name, and did itself a wrong by calling itself Romanticism; which took eccentric devices, innocently affected savage tendencies, discussed prodigiously, created almost as much, covered itself with ridicule and renown, committed some excesses, produced admirable works, but in the end promulgated nothing.

In this general movement of minds towards independence, painting had its distinct rôle and proper initiative. Later, there were mutual influences which confused it for a moment, and would almost permit us to ask whether the painter or the literary man was the initiator. A common desire to refresh themselves, to change place, to change epoch; the love of history, of costume, of the romantic; the need of aiding each other in their researches, and of sustaining each other for the demonstration of their thesis, — all these closely associated them in their choice of ideas and combination of subjects. But in the beginning every one acted on his own account. The signal was given at almost the same date. There hardly seemed to be concerted action. It was not a conspiracy. They met each other in the struggle, and each one could

claim the honor of having attacked his adversary directly, and struck the first blow at his master, the past.

The moment, moreover, was one of those that the destiny of the arts, like that of nations, appears to choose from time to time for the breaking of certain fasces and the dispersion of certain inheritances. The last great classic painter died abroad, leaving to represent him in France four pupils and four studios, — that was one unity broken, — four provinces instead of an empire; and among these four pupils there was already one very insubordinate disciple, an anticipated innovator, bold, enthusiastic, excited by the sounds of war, theatrical, eloquent, nourished by ancient formulas, and not concealing the fact, but animating them with a wholly modern pathos, and a sort of tenderness unknown till then; in a word, the first, and perhaps unconsciously the most influential of the revolutionaries, as Sieyès was the first of the Girondins. Now what was peculiar in this affiliation of new ideas was that the real revolution issued, not from that studio, so widely open to permit it to take its flight, but, as has been often remarked, from the very place which should have crushed its germ and stifled it at its birth.

As if by a prodigy, it came straight from the hands of the most reserved, the most sorrowful and timorous of the representatives of the old régime.

The revolution, having narrowly escaped the danger of being still-born, began a career.

You are aware, gentlemen, of what belongs to its history, — the brilliancy of its *début*, the personal superiority of its chiefs, the youth which gave to it the future as a possession, and the peculiar cultivation of their minds, which gave them such diverse means of influence or investigation. I need not recall to you how divided was opinion in those first days, what stupefaction was caused among friends obstinately partial to the traditions thus menaced; the boundless confidence and joy that the partisans of the new order experienced; and the sentiments mingled with disquietude and favor that this first essay of the modern spirit inspired in some of its adversaries, and even in some of its friends. There were, as always happens in such cases, compromises, temperaments, transitional characters which modified the passage of one rule into

the other. With men like Géricault on one side, and Gros on the other, the hope of mutual understanding might be preserved. The disfavor with which the *Wreck of the Medusa* was received resulted as much from the quite accidental unpleasantness of the subject as from the singularity of the work. A few years sufficed to obliterate the burning remembrance of a great disaster, and bring into more just accord opinions concerning this work, so eminently classic in its science, carefulness of form, and execution which conforms, with some few variations of treatment, to that of which the example is found in the *The Battle of Aboukir*, or the *Battle of Eylau*. The *Chasseur* and the *Grenadier of the Guard* were in existence, moreover, to calm much anxiety by recalling to those who might be alarmed by this man's youth, the eccentricity of his manners, his elegant and worldly life, his marked taste for the modern drama, his rapidity in painting, and his extreme boldness in marrying in grand proportion a picturesque sense to the severities of history, — all the knowledge that an innovator hardly twenty years old had from the beginning manifested in the way of method and true wisdom.

But the death of Géricault, considered only from this almost political point of view, was to be an event without remedy for the friends of conciliation. The sole man who could bring the two parties together by inspiring them with mutual confidence, and if not with the same respect, at least with the same security, having disappeared, agreement was despaired of. Thenceforth there were, facing each other, two schools, irreconcilably separated, without kind feeling for each other, one resting on its ancient rights, upon long-tried habits, upon rules definite, fixed, and clearly established ; the other rising purely by its strength, listening only to its enthusiasm for liberty, and invoking solely the right to its natural and personal inspiration.

This is a moment which perhaps has not attracted enough notice, and it is also the sole point necessary for me to dwell upon in an assemblage of facts so often and so minutely studied.

The situation was singular ; and the attitude of the two schools called upon to convince each other, not by disputes in words, but by fine works, was far from similar. On one side were great names, ancient traditions, much knowl-

edge, method, and good habits; on the other individualities, indisputably superior, a boldness ready to try everything, an audacity of race and intelligence of a character to make great things expected. But if the old school had for itself the reassuring example of the past, the new had before its eyes the unknown. So it was not without embarrassment that it found itself in presence of such a mystery. One of the revolutionaries, — the most illustrious of all, — M. Eugène Delacroix, told me that in 1824, at the time he began his second picture, he found himself singularly embarrassed. The *Boat of Dante* had given a very favorable idea of this youthful and great talent, but the author says it was not in accordance with his real programme. He had conceived it under the inspiration of his master and friend, Géricault. He did not tell me so, but it is almost certain that the author of the *Wreck of the Medusa* put his own hand to it. Now the time had come to separate himself from all influence, and to assert himself in a work grander and more personal, conceived and executed in a more radical sense. This great page, one of his most celebrated and most justly admired works, was in the condition of a sketch, and the author wanted to know what to do with it. The advanced sketch was like Girodet's work. The problem was to color it. How? by what methods? in what scale, — light or dark? This brilliant imagination, which loved splendor, and savored already of Rubens, was opposed to the use of black, to effects drawn from powerful shadows, and that general use of bituminous tones which, handled lightly by the school of the empire, produced sepias, which, lavished by Géricault . . .

Here the manuscript stops. It begins again further on with the following lines, which end abruptly: —

Géricault returned from England, where he had seen painting singularly clear and vivid, with the same coloring, frank in accent, which seemed to him derived, without too much relationship, from Rubens and Vandyck, and which appeared to him to be what was wanting for the needs of his school. He took M. Delacroix into his confidence, who waited. Shortly after, the latter

judged the English himself from an exhibition of their painters in Paris, and made up his mind. A few light works of Gainsborough and Constable sufficed to enlighten him. . . . Thanks to this very positive illumination, the *Massacre of Scio*, which otherwise had nearly resembled the *Endymion* of Girodet, became the brilliant work you know, the manifesto of the new school, and the purest work of this master. . . .

. .

The rest of this unfinished study, to judge by the interest of that part which I can put before the reader, would certainly have been very curious.

The notes that I found at the end of the manuscript, which were for the whole work, led me to believe that what in the beginning was intended to be only a simple lecture, had become in Fromentin's mind a whole book, in which he would have traced the critical history of the romantic movement before judging the efforts of the present generation, and arriving at the conclusion of his "Critic's Programme." It is to be supposed that Fromentin, terrified by the unforeseen dimensions of his task, feared to be turned aside by it from more urgent labor.

After this study in detail of his works in succession, let us take a view of them as a whole. Fromentin had one of the most delicate of delicate natures, and to find his just value one must be delicate also. He was a sensitive painter in the finest sense of the word, consequently nervous, tender, and a little anxious. His aims are of supreme distinction, and in his pursuit of the true expression of nature he remains a pure idealist. His dominant merits are a subtle feeling for gesture and movement, a lively imagination, a happy gift of composi-

tion, with elegant and well-chosen forms, and the rendering from nature of luminous effects in their infinite surprises. His virtues are his aristocratic tastes, his reserve of manner, his absolute respect for himself and for his talent, and a perhaps excessive horror of military tumult and attitudes. His private mark is an extraordinary power of mem-



ory, — a power which comprises at the same time memory of mind and hand. He is a painter more by instinct than education; and his instinct often guides him better than patient study. The result he desired is simple and clear, — to make man live in the very life of the nature which frames him. His methods are complex, and very subtle. He is rarely simple, but is always sincere.

Fromentin, then, sought everywhere and always the intimate alliance of man and nature, avoiding alike *the subject*, which sacrifices nature to man, reduces him to an accessory rôle, and *landscape*, wherein man appears only as a picturesque addition, or a necessary gradation. Like the naturalistic painters, but from another point of view, he deemed that nothing mediocre exists in nature, and that everything is a question of interpretation, measure, and synthesis. He will be better understood if one turns to the digression, already quoted, which he devotes in the "Sahel" to our great orientalist painters, Marilhat, Decamps, and Delacroix, — the landscape painter, the *genre* painter, and the painter of history. From a compromise between these two masters was born the elegant, harmonious, and balanced painter of the Algerian Sahel.

VI.

THE WRITER.



WE have followed the painted work, let us now undertake the written work.

I cannot say that I feel more at ease about it, but certainly the task is easier. Fromentin was master of his pen much earlier than of his pencil, and almost without groping at all; at least his period of apprenticeship was the same as that of his classic studies, his extremely rare literary aptitude having so served him that he neither needed to seek a way nor a manner. Here Fromentin shows himself upon his true ground. We feel that he is in the right place; his pen knew not the often painful struggles from which he had to suffer in another domain. The four volumes he wrote are wrought with a loving hand, even with refinement; but they are carefully planned, and nowhere is there any mark of uncertainty.

His talent as a writer is, as a whole, of a firmer and more homogeneous nature, and of a more resisting metal than his talent as a painter. Let no one misunderstand my thought from this observation. I would not in the least detract from the eulogium I have paid the artist: I only desire to testify by a higher degree of comparison the esteem I have for what came from the hand of the man of letters.

The first vocation of Fromentin was, as we have seen, entirely literary; and although painting in the end absorbed him entirely, and brought him fortune and honors, the former continued to direct his life. Moreover, the writer was in a certain way served, completed, and developed by the painter. This is a good fortune of which it would be difficult to cite another example. All the studies and conquests of the second brought to the first new resources, — an increase of talent, vigor, delicacy and precision; and especially gave him that clearness of picturesque perception that no one has yet possessed in literature to the same degree.

It is essential to state precisely the peculiarity of this alliance of two arts. The author of "A Summer in the Sahara" would run the risk of being unfairly judged, if it were forgotten that he wrote in his studio, that is, in a special atmosphere. The painter, on the contrary, seems to have gained much less from the neighborhood of the author.

I will not return to the literary beginnings of Fromentin, for I have said all that I wished to say of them. I have rapidly indicated his first attempts in a provincial journal; I have noticed that poetry, at first his chosen muse, led him by excellent roads to the fine and

severe prose of the "Sahara." It would certainly be curious to look over his juvenile papers, but it will be sufficient to testify to the precocity of his literary talent.

We reach at a bound the brilliant effort which remains his masterpiece, — a little volume entitled "A Summer in the Sahara," first published in the "Revue de Paris."

Fromentin was then perfectly unknown as a writer, and hardly known as a painter. The little group of all the *dilettanti* of Paris, whose opinion in those civilized days sufficed to raise or destroy a reputation, spared him neither praise nor success. From the first lines, the cause was gained with the arbiters of criticism, and among those there were two who opened fire with enthusiasm, — George Sand and Sainte-Beuve. More was certainly unnecessary to assure the literary fortune of Fromentin. Michel Lévy hastened to ask him to edit the volume of articles from the "Revue de Paris," and the surly doors of the "Revue des Deux Mondes" opened to him.

From this moment dates a lively current of sympathy between the critic, the romance writer, and the painter. Between George Sand and Fromentin the volume of the "Sahara" became the foundation of an unalterable friendship, very frank on each side and very fruitful for Fromentin, who drew from it great encouragement and frank counsel. These two eminent minds met in the serenest regions of their ideal, in the enthusiastic worship of nature. Nothing draws people together like admiration and community of sentiment; and certainly few people have listened with such passion, understood more subtly, or translated with more vivid desire for exactness, the



ARAB GROOM

language of nature. In them the comprehension of nature had become a sixth sense. The greatest strength of the talent of the author of the "Mare au Diable," like that of the author of the "Sahara," is in that exquisite feeling of the naturalist. It is impossible not to thrill with them. I do not know who it was — Théodore de Banville, I think — who divided men into two classes, the luminous and the refractors. George Sand and Fromentin are luminous in the highest degree. From their pens flow thrillingly warm and vivid sensations, continually moving, and varied like nature; shining sparks, like animated molecules, emanations from the things themselves, giving to their impressions an incredible clearness. George Sand, an ardent disciple of Jean Jacques, has more tenderness and emotion; Fromentin, more of an innovator in his methods, is also much more of a painter, — that is, he is more exact, minute, and plastic, and, above all, more concentrated; but the talent is equal in both.

Under the exterior of a very simple, almost modest composition, the "Sahara" is a perfectly finished work of art. I need not apologize for it to painters who in their art are used to practising the eye in the study of the precise accent of nature. As to men of letters who can relish the mother qualities of the French tongue, who, like true craftsmen, enjoy the setting of the work for itself, they will not hesitate to class "A Summer in the Sahara" among the rarest jewels of our literary casket. Why should I not say what I think? I esteem this little volume as a masterpiece of picturesque literature. Read slowly, curiously, in the manner of a *gourmet* or a landscape painter, these pages of such perfect clearness of coloring, at once so brilliant and

so true; study these pictures of such firmness of outline, such concentrated drawing,—then, after having read, close your eyes, and think of the peculiar note, felt as a painter feels, that the writer wished to utter, and acknowledge on your conscience that nothing of the same kind has been written so closely allied to the truth. As M. Émile Montégut, in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," so justly set forth, from the first to the last line of the "Sahara" it is impossible to find a vague expression, a weak epithet, or an abstruse phrase. "For appropriateness and precision in the use of terms," he adds, "Fromentin is without an equal." This is, in fact, his great originality. Take a fragment of the "Sahara," for instance the one where the high summer of the desert regions appears in a sort of dazzling vision, where the cloudless sunshine gleams with implacable ardor (June, 1853, high noon), and compare with it any page of Théophile Gautier's volumes of travel, however picturesque and sparkling with color, and see if the precise and attentive art of Fromentin, an art of which the energy of observation is made tenfold more keen by the painter's craft, is not far superior. From this special point of view, Gautier's talent, of which I admire as much as any one the pithiness, flexibility, sonorous richness, and marvellous poetic imagination, is inferior to that of the author of the "Sahara" and "Sahel."

Bits of faultless rendering abound in these two volumes. Some are perhaps more salient, more finished as pictures, in the second; but the "Sahara" has a more exquisite value in my eyes. The first to appear, it has rather more vivacity of impression, more youthfulness, more simplicity, and also more unity. The "Sahel," which

appeared two years afterwards, being engendered, so to speak, by the success of its predecessor, is a work more carefully composed. Literary men will prefer it, and George Sand had an evident preference for it; but painters will hold to the "Sahara," and I am on their side.

The "Sahara" is the African summer with its excesses of light and color, its implacable calm, its dreary oppression, its roughness, and strange poetry; the "Sahel" is smiling and verdant Algeria, with its changing misty skies, its varied tones, accidents of light, Arcadian mountains, and veiled receding horizons.

The "Sahel" is the journal of a year's sojourn in Algiers and its environs; that is, in all that privileged region which extends in a triangle between the plain of Mitidja and the sea. The note of tenderness vibrates in it oftener than in the "Sahara," and a feeling for gentle things arises with happy tranquillity in the penumbra of a transparent half-light. Fresh and delicate scales of color are multiplied in it, and one seems to feel in it the breath of spring; all shades of color are used in it with prodigious art. Under the apparently careless freedom of the canvas, is a clever dramatic arrangement of tales, pictures, images, — those speaking images of things that Fromentin uses to awaken in the mind long delicious reveries; and the thousand nothings of the contemplative life which in these countries have such charm, expand, entwine, spring up in unexpected flames, or die away in a vague murmur and captivate the attention without ever wearying it. The very monotony of certain aspects, the return of certain thoughts, the frequency of certain impressions, become one

more attraction. Interest does not languish for a moment; it has even upon certain natures more effect than the most moving romance, by that magic power the author has of making us live, think, and see with him. Everything, even that strange figure of Haoua, whether real or invented matters little, adds to this book of travel a light and discreet condiment of romance. She furnishes to Fromentin's pencil subjects of exquisite grace; she pervades the work with a childlike smile, or like a tiny animal eager for caresses and sweets; and suddenly her tragic death, amid the sparkling of a fantasia, clothes her with a noble and poetic melancholy. Are not those curious episodic figures of Vandell and the smoker Nâman struck like medals? There are in all these qualities of composition, which, brought into relief by the eulogiums of such authorized judges as George Sand, certainly led Fromentin to write later the romance of "Dominique." For, and it is that perhaps which it is especially important to show, if landscape is the foundation of his work, man is never wanting in it; and, what is better, he always occupies the foreground.

The two volumes have for point of departure a series of letters written on the spot to M. Armand Dumesnil.[1] I say for point of

[1] I think that it will not be without interest to give here one of these letters, preserved by M. Dumesnil and published by M. Burty in his work on the drawings of Fromentin: —

"I do not know whether you can read this: my ink is like water, and I write like a stenographer. Within a fortnight I have wanted to write you a dozen times. The overflow of my ideas, the profusion and confusion of too recent impressions, accumulated novelties, the difficulty of becoming used to this country so different from others, with the conflict in my head between the news from France (1848) and the impressions of the moment, have absolutely prevented my writing. I think that you will excuse me, and will understand my condition.

departure; for as Fromentin acknowledges himself, in the preface to his third edition, they were written in repose and from memory, as his pictures were painted. This preface is very instructive to read, and betrays many of the secrets of Fromentin's literary craft. It defines marvellously what he is seeking, the innovations he attempted, not with the methods and neologisms of the romantic school, but as a classic, with that pure and beautiful French language of the good old time, which he rightly finds "astonishingly wholesome even in its ordinary usage, and within its usual limits, and inexhaustible in re-

"Upon my word, I find I have a courage which I knew nothing of. This rather rough life I lead develops, it seems to me, certain moral forces that I did not recognize myself as possessing.

"You left me at Constantine starting for that unknown country in the South. This is what has happened: Since then I have travelled sixty leagues on the back of mules through very wonderful regions. I took notes on the journey, which I have not transcribed for lack of time. The third day at evening we slept at Batna, the seventh evening we reached the bridge El-Kantara. Remember this name, for it will be the rendezvous of my memories, and when we talk together of Africa I shall take you to this bridge.

"The plain of the valley that one traverses for five or six leagues before reaching the bridge is a frightful chaos of stones. The mountains, very lofty on the right and superb in outline, less lofty on the left and squarely cut like tables, are nothing but the living rock. The soil is a rocky dust of silex or calcareous earth: it might seem, from the sharp breakage and the narrow crests of the mountains, that some shock had separated them from each other, and that the bursting rocks, reduced to powder by time, the sun, and the waters, had now become the pavement of the lowlands of the valley.

"Not a blade of grass, not even moss. The sun's reflection is incredible. From afar can be seen on the left a narrow cut in the mountain. This gorge, quite large at the summit, narrows gradually towards the base. It is there that the river El-Kantara enters the first valley of the desert. This is the gate of the Sahara. It is said that neither the severe winds of the Tell nor the rain have ever passed the threshold of this inviolate kingdom of the sun and torrid heats. At this very place, and over this river, was built the Roman bridge El-Kantara, which gives its name to the oasis, the village, and the river. It is approached by a wide circuit, the road becoming more and more difficult. At last, the foot-path between the rock and the river becomes so narrow and uncertain that it seems impossible to reach the goal. Sharp crags menace you with their enormous mass, eight

sources," excellent soil which can produce anything if it is only tilled. It explains why Fromentin confined himself with fixed purpose to these two books of travel, in spite of the temptation to a fresh success. To tell the truth, the two volumes form one whole, full of unity; and M. Plon was right to unite them in one continuous volume. In order to fully relish them, they should not be separated from each other.

It is a great privilege to present one's self to posterity with a small, well selected amount of literary baggage: it gives one a chance of survival. History likes ready-made selections, and, other

hundred feet high. A man becomes an ant. One more turn, and you reach an acclivity paved with ancient stones, and find yourself upon the bridge. The entrance of the gorge is, at the outside, a hundred metres in length; it is dark, damp, and narrow; at the level of the bridge it grows wider and spreads out. Before you, in the space between the walls of the mountains, you see a compact mass of dark, cold, dull green, overtopped by a few more lofty tufts; you recognize palm-trees, a palm grove! forty-eight thousand palms seen almost at a glance, and waving in an atmosphere blue, fluid, and spangled with sparks of fire by the setting sun.

"The doctor who was with us, and who for the second time in his life crossed this celebrated bridge, stopped his horse and saluted it.

"I cannot continue, — I wish, my friends, that you could have passed that evening with us.

"On the next day, the seventh of our journey, at five in the evening, after a stage of eighteen leagues of which eight were through paths fringed with oaks, we reached the summit of the last mountain buttresses that border the desert.

"A slender dark line extended in front of us about a league in length: this was Biskra. On the left six leagues away, was another shorter line, lost in the mists of the extreme distance: this was the oasis of Sidi-Ockba, that we have visited since. Finally, beyond, and extending around the horizon, was a stiff line, barely softened by the mists of the extreme distance, gray, shaded by fogs, as uniform as the sea, without its color: this was the desert.

"Auguste and I stopped a moment before this first strange vision; then we put our mules to a slow trot; and, an hour later, we entered through the palms the narrow and singular streets of that picturesque village built of mud, the principal and most important of the seven villages which compose the oasis of Biskra."



THE STREET OF BAB-EL-GHARBI AT EL AGHOUAT.

Picture exhibited in the Salon of 1859 by Eugène Fromentin.

things being equal, it will accord more attention to short, well-defined works. On what depends the immortality which crowns the names of Longinus, Horace, La Bruyère, La Rochefoucauld, and even of Bernardin de Saint Pierre, and Xavier de Maistre? Upon the perfection of one work alone, upon the weight of a little duodecimo volume. Such is the case with Fromentin, who would be Fromentin in the same degree for the future, if he had not produced either "Dominique" or the "Old Masters of Belgium and Holland."

I have said that George Sand, with her accustomed sincerity and cordiality, was in the vanguard of those who celebrated the dawn of Fromentin's talent. She devoted an article to the "Sahara" in "La Presse" in 1857, and a second (May 10, 1859) to the "Sahel," which had just appeared at Michel Lévy's. It is interesting to recall them: the praise is unreserved. "At every page of this beautiful book," says the illustrious writer in her second article "we feel that the author is a true poet, who has lived his inner life amidst the scenes which surrounded him like reflections in a mirror, and that he profoundly felt them before thinking of rendering them. A true painter, for you know he is a painter, he has travelled and seen like a painter: . . . his literary form is one of the finest paintings that we have ever read." She recalls afterwards the subtle and ingenious distinction made by Fromentin between the *traveller who paints*, and the *painter who travels*, and is astonished that he could have been both at the same time. Then she compares the two volumes with each other. "Whatever may be said and thought of southern regions, they have generally as a dominant characteristic nakedness, extent,

and a certain desolate influence which is overwhelming. To be felt at a distance, they must reach us in a rich and simple rendering, and thanks to this remarkable rendering M. Eugène Fromentin has made us comprehend the exhausting beauty of the Sahara.

"The Sahel, less severe and more smiling, permitted him to load his palette with more varied tones. He reveals to us a new richness in his talent, which completes him. To see him so impressed and filled with the mournful majesty of the desert, one might have feared not to find him so sensitive to vegetation, which is the life of landscape, and to activity, which is the life of man. It is not so. He has not imposed a manner upon himself; his subject has not absorbed him. Always master of his individuality, there is felt strongly in him the power of a dreamy contemplative soul, married, as it were, to the eternal spectacle of nature.

The two volumes, and the two articles were for George Sand and Fromentin the beginning, first, of a very interesting exchange of letters, and then of a very firm friendship. Having had this double correspondence put into my possession through the kindness of M. Maurice Sand, for Fromentin's letters, and through that of Madame Fromentin, for those of George Sand, — both of whom I warmly thank here, — I can publish some of the unprinted pages of the author of the "Sahara," and find in the replies of his illustrious friend evidences of the frankest sympathy. They are certainly letters of great value, and I consider it a rare good fortune to be able to publish them. Fromentin's letters to George Sand have all the delicacy, the aristocratic tone, and the elegance of style that might be

expected. They throw light upon the inner recesses of his nature. If they seem sometimes of too studied a turn, we must not forget that the carefulness of form marked a shade of respect for the woman, and admiration for her talent.

St. Maurice, March 23, 1857.

Madame, — I receive with confusion the letter you have been good enough to write me. Will you permit me to respond to it at least by the expression of my lively gratitude? There is in the feeling that I experience in hearing myself so praised by you, nothing that I can properly express. This is neither mock modesty, nor too highly flattered pride. I am simply astonished that I have done anything to merit such a welcome from you: I am profoundly touched by it: and now I should be distressed to stop at this point. You would certainly understand all the feelings that you almost authorize me to speak of to you, if I had the honor to be known to you otherwise than by this little book, which might give you reason to think me a writer by profession, whereas I have never been, and never can be one but by chance. For unfortunately I am a painter. I say unfortunately, while waiting to prove it more honorably.

Whatever may happen to me in either of these two careers between one or the other of which I shall probably vibrate, I shall, Madame, guard the memory of your words, as a spur, not to my self-esteem, but to my peseverance. Such encouragement as yours would produce a desire to do well, even in those who have never known what it is; and this desire I know I possess to a degree that makes it a torment.

Your letter, I know not why, Madame, leads me to a revealing of myself that I must beg you to excuse, if it seems presumptuous.

And as to the particularly obliging offers that you are so kind as to make me, believe, Madame, that if ever I can respond to them, whenever time and place permit, it will be with great pleasure that I shall offer you, with a fresh expression of my gratitude, the homage, already of long standing, of my respectful admiration. Eugène Fromentin.

To the letter of March 23, Madame Sand replied in terms of exuberant warmth.

NOHANT, March 27, 1857.

MONSIEUR, — Your letter gives me much pleasure, because I am glad to have given you pleasure; but I have not done yet. I owe you my opinion of the second half of the volume, which is still more beautiful than the first. The meeting with the tribe is a masterpiece; and it is the painting of a master, for although there is no event in this journey, we make it with you with the same artistic passion you put into it. And it is a wise passion, always true, tasteful, simple and sincere. I believe you do not suspect your own talent. But so much the better: remain modest, — that is, a true artist, — and you will do still better, if better be possible. You have ten times as much in you as there is in Jacquemont, and perhaps, between ourselves, than all those who write now-a-days upon any subject whatever. I do not know whether your painting is equal to your literature; but, if it is, you must have a rarely endowed organization.

As for me, I thank you for those delicious evenings I have passed in reading you with a friend as surprised and enchanted as myself. We had been like poor fishes stuffed with straw, saturated with deceptions, or with satisfactions almost always mingled with great vexations; and suddenly we found ourselves floating in limpid water steeped in sunshine. The country itself does not tempt me. I assure you that I shall never visit it. Of what use would it be? I have seen it, I know it, I am conversant with it since I have read you. It is like a picture by Delacroix, and I feel in it even more certainty. There is in it not a shadow of fancy. I have relished all that was great and all that was beautiful in it. I am too old to suffer all that you did to see it. Moreover, I have a passion for trees; I do not like plains. . . .

GEORGE SAND.

ST. MAURICE, April 1, 1857.

MADAME, — On returning home after an absence of some days, I find your letter, which came on Monday. That admirably kind and invigorating letter

causes me a satisfaction that I cannot conceal from you. It absolutely fills me with confusion; and, in order not to repeat myself, I seek for a phrase which shall render precisely what I experience, and I can find none. I am much agitated and greatly moved by this favor, which I was far from expecting, and which I esteem at its full value, while I am more grateful for it than I ever can express to you.

Permit me to see in it the anticipated recompense, of what I may do well at some future day, if the event corresponds to the impatient desire I have for it. I prefer, Madame, to take your esteem as an advanced payment made me in view of the future: although I am no longer of an age to call myself a young man, this accords better at least with the unchangeable opinion that I have of my present worth. My value is very small, believe me, and in knowledge as well as in fertility my resources are very slight. Apparently I am worth less than my book, on which subject I am obliged to take you at your word.

No, Madame, there is no subtle self-esteem in all this. I am determined to say it to you, for I am distressed that my persistence in a low estimate of myself should be a subject of suspicion with you. Nor is there a shadow of it in the great satisfaction of mind that you give me, in concerning yourself about me with a kindness which extends from my book to myself. I should deceive you, if I allowed you to believe me modest. I am terribly mistrustful of my strength, that is all. Mistrustful by nature and with reason, when I compare myself with what seems to me the true goal of every man who tends towards excellence.

You give me admirable advice, Madame, that I ought and desire to follow, but I have only time to produce. When shall I have time to learn?

As to my painting, I am in no hurry to make it known to you. It will assuredly disenchant you. Not that it is bad: it is no better and no worse than the greater part of the lesser works of our day. It is commonplace. Such as it is, I can gain a living by it. But I am without indulgence for myself as for others; and as my admiration for contemporary painting is very limited, that would give you a measure of my judgment of my own work, if you knew it.

For me the question is very simple. I shall never think that I have produced anything of worth, till the day that I approach what I know to be undoubtedly good. And as the goal is well defined in all sorts of painting, by all the masters, the route is indicated, and the distance to traverse easy to estimate.

This is the point I have reached; and I am anxious, Madame, to show you with absolute truth the rate at which I estimate my artistic value, and at which you should hold it for the present.

I would rather promise to be good than to become a *true painter;* and I thank you, Madame, for giving me this advice, which proves to me that you have some hope of being understood. The life I lead; the isolation I delight in, and in which I continue to live even in Paris; the aims of my private ambition, which will never cause me to do what I shall afterwards regret; my natural disposition, of which I reap the moral benefit, — all these are possibly conditions which will render my task easier than it would be to others. And if that sufficed to preserve for me an esteem so quickly acquired, believe me, Madame, that I shall be less embarrassed by my personality, on the day when I shall have the honor to see you.

That will doubtless be in Paris, since you are so kind as to invite me there, and I shall soon return.

I cannot tell you how unexpected and how inestimable such a welcome is for me. I will profit by it, Madame, believe me, as I may and as I ought, that is, very humbly, and with a profound feeling of what I owe to you.

I do not think that my book is much talked about in Paris; or rather, if it is spoken of in certain circles, if the book sells, — which I know nothing about, and which concerns Lévy, — I do not see that there is much said of it by the press. I have only read one very kindly article by Théophile Gautier in the "Artiste." . . . EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

NOHANT, Dec. 12, 1858.

MONSIEUR, — Charles Edmond asks me, perhaps partly on your account, if I am pleased with the "Sahel." I am not pleased: I am enthusiastic about it.

I had already written to M. Buloz to tell him my opinion, and to compliment him upon his good fortune. I live so far from everything, that I do not know whether you have the success that you deserve, and I wanted very much to write an article about this masterpiece. But I fear doing you more harm than good, by giving you for literary enemies all those that I have myself. Moreover you need no assistance. Whoever can read and understand must appreciate an exceptional talent which manifests itself with such modesty, elevation, and truth of color. For, whatever you may say, you are in literature a great painter of localities, and I am not absolutely of your opinion that the Seine is only a river. So much the better, if your instinct leads you to particularize. Follow it, since it is so powerful and so fine. Here I do not speak of your painting. I have seen none of your painting with the *brush*. But your eye is so highly gifted, and style is a form you handle with so much *maestria* (grandeur and skill married together), that I see what you see, and feel what you feel, absolutely as you do yourself, I dare to say. This is a tremendous result that you know how to obtain, of which you have the full honor. I have now seen Africa; I walk there; I breathe there; I know the figures which fill it; I know the odor of its woods, and the color of its immensity; and all who read you must be equally illumined by this ray of truth and life that you know how to reflect for others as you have received it. . . .

What enchants me is a very great and perceptible progress from the "Sahara" to the "Sahel." We devoured the former in our family, three of us, — my son, my artist friend who lives with us, and I, who did not influence them, for each one read the "Sahara" for himself; and I assure you that there is one little corner of the world where you are appreciated as you deserve, and that is at our house. . . . GEORGE SAND.

PARIS, Dec. 15, 1858.

MADAME, — I said nothing to Charles Edmond; but he doubtless divined, thanks to the friendship which renders him clairvoyant, the extreme desire I had to submit my "Sahel" to you, and know your opinion upon this fresh study. The desire was so great, that I should not have had patience to await

the publication of the volume, which will not appear until February, to entreat you to pass judgment upon it. This little book was written, I may say, under the direct influence of your encouragements, with the intention of responding to them, and an ardent desire to justify them. Permit me to acknowledge to you, Madame, that, in spite of myself, I have mingled with my work an obstinate and very disturbing feeling, the ever-present memory of your kindness, and a secret ambition to satisfy you. I was going then, after having hesitated ever since the first of December, to write to you, when your letter reached me this evening under cover of the "Review." This is a new service for which I am indebted to the affectionate interest of Charles Edmond. It is to him almost alone, (did you know?) that I already owe the good idea of carrying my book to M. Buloz.

After what you did for my "Sahara," I considered myself as pledged, not to the public, of which I know too little to think about it, but to your sympathy, which had imposed upon me an enormous debt. I tried to do well. I will even tell you that, in spite of the advice of certain friends who perhaps had not sufficient confidence in my power of will, I made it my theme and purpose to do better. All my anxiety now was to know whether I was mistaken, or if by chance I had succeeded. My "Sahel" is, I believe, a success; so far as I can judge by what I witness, for I am now in Paris. But I awaited a judgment without appeal, which should wholly reassure me, and which should moreover give me an opinion, for in spite of everything, I never have a very decided one about myself. This judgment was yours. A person who shares with me the anxiety of my work, and who participates in all my sentiments, especially those of gratitude, my wife (whom, permit me, Madame, to here present to you, for you have made her very happy), awaited your opinion like a sentence. Now you can judge of the weight your letter had with me, and measure the absolute happiness it caused me.

Were there only a slight improvement in the present over the past, that would suffice, from the moment that it is affirmed by you. Perhaps it is a dangerous ambition, but I have made a continuous amelioration the law of my labor. I have produced so little, I know so few things, I feel myself so far



CRAYON SKETCH MADE AT EL AGHOUAT.

Fac-simile of a drawing by Eugène Fromentin.

from the *truly good*, that I can conceive nothing more painful than to go no farther, with the exact, too exact, knowledge that I have of my faults. I have tried to avoid some, and to lessen others; and that is the sole superiority of execution that I wished particularly to manifest in this little book, wherein I proposed to myself to *voluntarily* bring back to life the memories that had drifted too far away from me, to preserve the eager enthusiasm of those early days.

It is only with great humility that I shall sustain, Madame, the points of doctrine that you judge disputable. The opinion that I express is at least entirely sincere; and I am making useless efforts at this moment to bring into accord painting and criticism, conscience and deeds. Which of the two is right? Perhaps neither of them; perhaps the truth lies between instinct too sensitive to novelty, and theory too immovable amid its traditions. I am incapable, moreover, of reasoning profoundly upon subjects that I have closely examined; and I am obliged to confess that I have rather a passing vision than a certainty of the truth.

I never should have dared to ask you, Madame, to do the signal honor to the "Sahel" that you have deigned to pay to the "Sahara." But if such was your intention, may I beg of you not to relinquish it. You created something for me two years ago in "La Presse," and from the patronage of your name I have gained, I imagine, only friends. I am not one of those, moreover, who can dispense with assistance. Even if I had with the readers whom you direct, a credit that I shall never obtain, this public testimony of your satisfaction would still be for me, as for every man who has his book at heart, a recompense that nothing can replace.

Finally, Madame, there is in your letter, so fortifying and so kind, an affectionate benevolence for which I want to thank you as I feel it. I have sought, ever since you did me the honor to invite me, a way to convey to you either in Paris or at Nohant the expression of my gratitude. I have been unable to detach myself from those slight but closely woven bonds of my now busy, and now roving existence. At Paris I vainly awaited your coming. I still hope, however, that chance, more ingenious than I, will furnish me the wished-for

opportunity to see you. I am now in Paris. That is to say in my studio, to which I have just returned after six months of sickness or infirmity, which I have employed as best I could in writing. Now I am painting. What will come from my palette, which seems to me a dictionary still more frightful than the one of words, doubtless because it is a tongue against which I rebel!

Receive, Madame, with the deep homage of my respect, this fresh expression of my gratitude. It could not be warmer. You render me the most important service that a great mind can offer to a mind eager to do well, and tortured by uncertainty.

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

Feb. 20, 1859.

MADAME, — I beg you to excuse me for replying at so late a date and so poorly to the last letter that you had the kindness to write me. There has not been an hour in this last fortnight when the thought that I ought to explain my silence, and beg you to accept my apologies has not been a real torment to me. It is, however, very voluntarily, Madame, and not in the least from negligence, (can you believe me?) that I have not yet thanked you either for your very kind letter or for the admirable article on the "Sahel" that I read at Charles Edmond's. I am in a wretched state of mind; a little ailing, and obliged to work all the same, to send to the Salon by a certain date some pictures which have given me the greatest anxiety. I am discontented, weary, uneasy, and in a black humor, which produces such a feeling of my weakness that everything which ought to encourage me most, changes into an oppression. All this is unfortunately very sincere, and very deep seated. Imaginary or not, it is a malady. Those who come near me know it well. When I am in this state, I hide myself and am silent, partly from powerlessness and particularly from being tired of talking about myself.

This is why, Madame, I have not written to you, whatever was my need and desire to do so. Will you forgive me for judging that the truth was due to you concerning the private reasons for my silence, and for having told it to you under the form of a confession?

I did not wait for the article to appear in the "Presse," as I thought that Charles Edmond would let me read it. I have not enjoyed it, for I was obliged to run through it too hastily, but I have seen it. It adds nothing to the entire satisfaction caused me by your letters; but I am embarrassed by it, and happy, honored, and grateful, as for a testimonial, and I may say an official certificate, by which I am honored in public opinion. It is admirably fine, grave, and affirmative. You desire especially to demonstrate to me something especially interesting for me, which is that, by instinct as well as theory, I am on the opposite side from what is to-day called realism; and you overwhelm me with joy by proving to me that I have succeeded in making my fictions live.

I thank you a thousand times, Madame, and beg you to understand from a single word the profound gratitude I feel to you.

The article does not appear; and I am particularly disappointed and sorry for myself, because I think I see in this the ill will of the chief editor. I know that a fortnight ago Sunday, the article was in the possession of the journal, and your name, Madame, ought to have made it appear on the first day.

Perhaps you know better than I what obstacle has retarded its publication. I have thought, for want of another supposition, that the publisher was a little vexed with me for having last summer allowed a book of mine, which did not appear, to be announced in his journal.

I am, however, very innocent in this matter, which has caused me great annoyance, though my sole fault was having been seriously ill. However that may be, I have written to M. Guéroult, according to Charles Edmond's advice; and, until now, my letter has had no great result.

Will you pardon me, Madame, for having thanked you so briefly, and on the other hand for complaining so abundantly? I should have been so glad to tell you that I was pleased with my work, especially at the very moment when the painter is about to appear beside the writer.

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

March 12, 1859.

MADAME, — I will repeat to you this evening what I have often said since I have been permitted to write to you, which is, that I am overwhelmed by an esteem bestowed so magnificently, and I am more grateful for your goodness than I shall ever be able to manifest to you. I read only yesterday evening the article published (at last !) in Thursday's "Presse." It has been impossible for me to thank you for it as I desired the moment I had read it. I hardly dare to write you to-day in the state of mind in which I am. I shall not have liberty, good sense, nor words, till I am rid of this abominable forced labor which has paralyzed me for months. Till then there will be in me only one thing living, and that is the power to feel all that I owe to you. But, even supposing that it could be expressed as I feel it, I know that I am incapable of expressing it; and for that reason am I humiliated, and suffer at the very time I am writing you.

You render me, Madame, an immense service. My book, which is going to appear I think next week, will be produced then as I had wished under your auspices. Announced, recommended, patronized, defined, justified, I might say explained by you; for I am surprised myself to discover in reading you the very idea of certain methods, and to perceive formulas of art in places where I had only worked from instinct. But the greatness of the service, the unrivalled importance of your patronage, the honor that you do the book, the success you insure for it, all that can flatter or serve an author, all this, Madame, — will you permit me to say? — is dominated by a more direct and intimate sentiment; and I am still more grateful to you, if it is possible, for your kindness than for your praise.

I thank you a thousand times, Madame, for the offer you have kindly made me of disposing of your article by printing it as a preface. But *a priori*, and no reflection can alter my manner of feeling, I cannot accept it; will you forgive me for explaining why, sincerely, and with the most absolute frankness?

I dare not; and I should suffer for it in a sentiment that I cannot conquer, and that I do not seek to specify, but that you will kindly understand.

You have the goodness to declare that my book has value; and I think so,

since you say it. Now the more complete and positive the testimonial of esteem, the more authority it has, and the less answer there is to it; and the less easily, I confess to you, could I decide to adorn myself with it before public opinion. Your article, Madame, has already had, and will still have, the renown of every writing signed by your name. All the more reason is there that I should hesitate to join it to my book. I should never dare thus to render the eulogium inseparable from the name of the author who has the good fortune and the honor to be its object. I should no longer dare to give my volume to any one, for the same reason that none of the letters that you have been so good as to write me have ever been read by any one outside of my family circle, and I should blush to think that they might be viewed by indifferent eyes. I do not know whether I explain myself clearly, for the true sentiment which I wish you to appreciate, Madam, has names which are also repugnant to me; but I would say to you, in this last extremity, that it is something like modesty or bashfulness, if those words did not cost me so much to write.

I let Charles Edmond see a part of my hesitation without showing him the substratum of my thought, for fear that he would have too good reason to oppose me. As to Lévy who only considers the question from the very evident point of view of the interest of the book, he is distressed that the article appeared too late for the volume to profit by it. He counts on making it the preface of the second edition. My refusal will fill him with consternation, and yet I shall very positively say no. I owe to you only, Madame, the explanation of a scruple, that also you alone will understand how to admit. It is hardly a subject for discussion; but it is sincere, and appears reasonable to me, since I feel it. And I prefer to sacrifice what is a most enviable satisfaction to my self-esteem, rather than suffer from a continual wound inflicted upon certain sides of my nature which are the most obscure, but the most sensitive.

This, Madame, is what I wanted to say to you immediately. To refuse an offer like yours is perhaps insensate; but at all events it is not ungrateful, and this is the only thing which I entreat you to believe, in receiving once more, the profound homage of my gratitude.

I have allowed you to see my weariness in my work, and you have been kind enough to interest yourself in it. Your last letter made me happy. I am not contented: but I have made up my mind to be calm; and as I am certain of having done, if not all that I wished, at least almost all that I was able to do, I think to-day more of the experience acquired than of the result. I do not know what may be the fate of my pictures; but I know very well that this painful effort will be of service to me, and that, if I am incapable of rendering these better, I shall soon paint others which will be worth more. I am constantly in a struggle with my books. And I know nothing more difficult in descriptive art than to give, by plastic ideas, the equivalent of literary ideas. Therefore I am very much afraid, Madame, that I never shall satisfy you by my painting, any more than I shall satisfy myself.

I beg you to accept, Madame, the homage of my profound respect and entire devotion.

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

July, 15, 1859.

You are so kind to me, Madame, that I owe you the first news of any good fortune that happens to me.

The distribution of prizes has taken place, and I have obtained a first medal and a cross. This result, which greatly exceeds my hopes, if I understand it properly, is addressed to the writer as much as to the painter. It is, for them both, rather an encouragement than a recompense. At least I consider every recompense or every favor of public opinion, rather as a new obligation for me. I have confided my anxieties to you more than once; and I am happy to be able to tell you that my work will become for that reason more confident, more tranquil, and I hope more productive. . . .

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

P. S. I am in constant relations with M. Delacroix, who is perfect in his kindness and interest for me.

NOHANT, JULY 22, 1859.

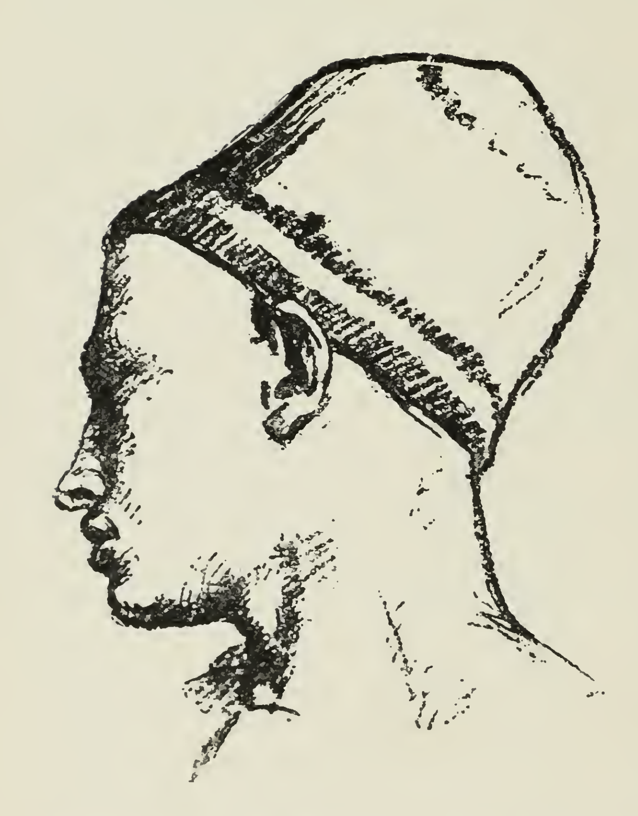
I have been a wandering soul for two months. I have seen all the volcanoes in the world (extinct ones) of Auvergne and of Velay. Good Heavens, what a fine country! I have often thought of you. I find your letter. I had already rejoiced on reading in the journals the distinctions awarded to you that you so well deserve. I had three great joys in Paris on your account. First that of seeing you, and finding *you yourself* so entirely in harmony with your talent, and all that reveals it. Then that of seeing your painting, which your



modesty had almost made me fear to do, though it is as beautiful as your books, and that is saying not a little. Finally, that of seeing how Delacroix appreciates and loves you. All this means that I, too, have an affection for you, and that I am glad to see you take your place in public opinion. It is not necessary in order to make you an artist and to make you happy; but it is very useful, especially to timorous souls like yours, and I hope that now you will doubt yourself no longer. Do not tell me that you owe me anything. I have served, perhaps, only to advance by one or two days the success that you could not fail to win. . . .

GEORGE SAND.

CHAPTER VII.



WE skip now to the year 1862, and come to the romance of "Dominique," which appeared at that time in the "Revue des Deux Mondes." I shall not say much of this work, whose very fine and brilliant qualities cannot efface its initial inexperience. Sainte-Beuve has made a study of it in his usual masterly manner, which leaves nothing more to be said. The romance of Fromentin had struck him, by its penetrating observation, its moderate and wholly French coloring, by the simplicity, without sensationalism, of its action, leaving, in its full relief, the study of character wrought with the utmost delicacy. "'Dominique,'" he says, "is the history of the childhood, and the earliest

youthful sentiments, of the person who bears this name. He himself relates, to a friend, this very simple story, — wholly personal, partly delightful, partly sorrowful, — and openly makes a confession to him." I will add that the setting, borrowed from the neighborhood of La Rochelle, and the greater part of the sentiments, belong to the life of the author himself, and, in many points of character, have the interest of an autobiography. Fromentin here brings into play all his gifts of analysis, and all his resources as a painter. Perfect passages abound; but the whole lacks unity, the conclusion drags, and the dénouement is more curious than natural. The romance, like the theatre, requires the use of methods which are acquired only by long practice, and Fromentin lacked that practice. It is necessary, then, in order to judge "Dominique" fairly, to take it as the intimate fancy of an artist whose charm, to borrow the expression of Sainte-Beuve, is entirely in developments and shades. There is no objection to seeing in it a sort of discreet homage rendered to the genius of George Sand. Their correspondence on the subject of "Dominique" deserves attention.

On April 18, 1862, after the first part appeared in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," George Sand wrote to Fromentin the following letter, which belongs to M. Arago, and which the latter has kindly communicated to me: —

Yes, it is very fine; it is admirably expressed, and it has an excellent substance: it moves a little slowly; but it is so well painted and posed! From the moment that "Dominique" begins to narrate, he carries the reader with him. The pistol-shot surprises one a little, but we know very well what is the reason

for it. What it *brings on* is very well *brought on* thus. This story resembles nothing else, and makes one seek, think, and expect a great deal. Instinct, from the romantic point of view, has done quite as well for it as if skilful combinations of events had brought about the event. All the painting of places, persons, situations, and impressions is exquisite. The analysis is very searching, very profound, mysterious in many cases, and well controlled. In fine, I await the following number with impatience. A fortnight is very long.

I cannot tell you how much good this reading does me. I do not know whether one can say that reason is genius, or whether genius is reason itself. But geniuses or talents, all make my head snap with their posing, and I find them all insane. Their manner of speech and thought is only a manner, from first to last. I do not know how to analyze as you do the causes of this amazing weariness they cause me. I cannot, like you, tell where the sublime begins and ends. I only judge by the impression left upon me, and like your "Dominique," with whom, moreover, I find myself brought into astonishing contact in my youthful memories, I feel much more than I know. With you, I live and exist, and the taste for writing returns to me. I cannot say that it is a bath which rests me; it is not so cold as that; it is a stream that bears me along, which I navigate while I see clearly what is flying past on the banks, journeying with confidence towards what will on the morrow be drawn upon fresh shores. For, on the whole, "Dominique" is not myself. He is very original. He listens to his own life, he judges himself, he wishes to understand himself, he fears himself, questions himself, and his happiness is sad or grave. I have for him an instinctive respect, and I feel myself a very child before a man who has reflected so much. But this pilot who has taken possession of my thought causes me no anxiety. I am sure that he is travelling towards the truth, and sees better than I the road we are pursuing. He lives in a more elevated, better chosen sphere; and even if there is a storm around us, he does not lose his self-possession. Thus, up to this point, I see "Dominique." But he will love, and probably suffer. About this I have a great curiosity. He will conquer. But by what means? This is the great problem for wisdom. I have often tried to solve it within myself in order to depict it. But it resolves itself

in my head into enthusiasm, and in my heart into happiness. This is because I need so little to feel myself very happy when the trouble of outside things leaves me quiet for a moment. It is, perhaps, the appreciation of this happiness, taken and relished in the simplest things, which will come either naturally or laboriously to "Dominique." We shall see; but I am in a hurry to know; and, apart from the execution of the book, which is and will be perfect (that is already assured), I will tell you if the thought persuades and contents me wholly. . . . GEORGE SAND.

This analysis, without preparation or pretension, of excellent grace and admirable good sense, was continued thus in a series of letters that George Sand addressed to her friend during the year 1862. They are, in the best sense, bits of the highest criticism; and I should allow myself the pleasure of giving them here were it not for trespassing upon the publication about to be made by M. Maurice Sand of his mother's letters. The same reason does not exist to prevent my publishing Fromentin's replies: —

April 19, 1862.

. . . You terrify me greatly by what you say to me, and by what you expect. I do not know myself what there is in my book. What you tell me about it will certainly be a discovery. I am not very sure of having proved anything, except that rest is one of the rare good fortunes that is possible, and also that everything would be better, men and works, if people had an opportunity to know themselves, and the sense to keep within their limits. What is clearest for me is, that I wished to please myself, to be moved by memories, and to find my youth once more in proportion as I drift away from it, and to express, in the form of a book, a large part of myself, *the best*, which can never find room in my pictures.

The book, as a book, is embryonic, I know very well.

Will it be interesting, in spite of the want of piquancy in the adventures, and that straight line without a turning which leads to the conclusion, like a drawn thread? Will it move others as it has moved me? That is the question.



Do not save my feelings, above all do not flatter me, I entreat you. I think that I am quite capable of doing better, and I have such a great desire to do so! It is sufficient if this little attempt, to which you permit me to attach your name, be not too unworthy of it. I say this in all sincerity. Just now, this concerns you almost as much as it does me. I cannot see anything in it.

I will rewrite it almost entirely if it is necessary; and if it needs a clearer or firmer morality, or something nobler and more reasonable, I will do whatever you shall decide.

In the first place, I can tell you that the introduction will be modified. This would have been done already if Buloz had given me time. I will give to "Dominique," re-treated, a more active part to play, one larger and more efficacious, in his important relations with a very little world.

He shall be less personal and more useful: his ancient magician's cabinet shall be seen less, and his acts more. He shall be something like an English gentleman. He shall have all the taste and science necessary for cultivating land. After having, unfortunately for the writer, put too much prose into his verse, happily for the man, he shall continue to mingle a little poetry with the good prose of benevolence and agriculture. In a word, without making him older, I will make him more determined, and will make him more manly.

Moreover, from one end to the other, there shall be a lack of accent, of strong affirmations and too great preciseness of manner.

I will tell you all that later. So do not weary of me before I am done.

What you tell me is so good and strengthening, that I am amazed at it. I shall certainly go to Nohant, if you desire, as soon as possible. . . .

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

PARIS, Sunday eve., May 25.

I can say only one thing to you, Madame and dear friend, which is, that in my thoughts I thank you continually for the good that each one of your letters does me; and if I can only simply say thank you, believe me this little, short, dry word contains a thousand expressions of gratitude. Whatever we may do, the thing you interest yourself in so kindly will never merit the name you attribute to it. You are content, and that suffices to render me very proud and very tranquil. The opinion of others will not prevail against the security that you give me. Now I am all ears, and all obedience, and I will listen to you. Whatever you propose I will do; and I shall have no difficulty in following your opinion in that, for it is wise. I myself have no idea of the management, the logic, and the true conditions of equilibrium of a book properly constructed. I have an instinct, but beyond that not the shadow of a reason.

Judge by this. The pistol-shot was brought on by a mere chance of my pen; but once having occurred, I drew from it Dominique's impulse to unbosom himself, and I persuaded myself that it really took place, since it served to induce the confidence. I tried later to explain it as well as I could, and that was poorly, since the explanation appears to you insufficient. As to the suddenness of the conclusion, there was the same unpremeditatedness. My heart was panting after having written the farewells; and, without leaving my seat, I rushed with the last chapter, — solely to recover myself, and, as if from an entirely personal need of rest, — into a more serene conclusion of life, after long years of interval.

You see that such methods cannot be defended; and do not let trivialities of this nature weigh too heavily with the friendly critic who is to treat of my "Dominique" as a book with a reason. Then, *a priori*, I abandon everything to you; and since you do me the pleasure to afford me permission, we will talk it over.

I will write to M. . . . at the end of the week. I will ask him your day, and on the day fixed I will hurry to Nohant, which for me will be no small festival and no small honor. Thus I will improve in proportion to your directions; and then — I will try to do better another time; for, in spite of yourself, I see plainly you will always be too indulgent.

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

PARIS, June 20, 1862.

. . . I only passed through Paris on Wednesday to find my little world at Versailles, where I spent the night. Yesterday, on my return, I went to Hetzel's. Hetzel was not there, and I did not think it too indiscreet to execute your commission to some one who received me for him, — an associate, I suppose, or confidential clerk. He took a note of the page where, after your souvenirs, there was an omission in "The Life." I explained your dissatisfaction, and *they will examine into it*. They *apologize*. But what is to be done? I would prefer to have some more decided promise to take better care for the

future; and I am not very much pleased with the result of my attempt, which now seems to me to have been useless.

As to Perrin, whom I have seen, his dream has been for a long time to have the "Mare au Diable." He sees in it, he says, "a magnificent comic opera; scenic types, dramatic and musical situations, a rich and charming setting." These are his words.

But Madame V.'s music, which he is unacquainted with, inspires him with less confidence. He does not know it, and suspects it. He will see. He will read "Drac," which he has not yet read. He would very much like to have Maurice with you. And as to the music, he does not seem to be embarrassed about finding an author. He named Massé. Does the name please you as much as it seems to reassure him? Besides this, M. . . . tells me that yesterday you came to a conclusion on the subject of "Drac," with an ambassador from the Vaudeville, which would cut everything short with the Opera Comique.

I am a poor negotiator; but if, acting under your orders, with definite directions, I could be useful to you in any way, you know, Madame, that I ask you as a favor to make use of me. Give me, then, an opportunity to prove my good-will. EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

Nov. 9, 1862.

I have upon my table a letter that I was writing you three weeks ago, to speak to you of my "Dominique," and to say to you — a thing I hardly dare avow — that I was never able to make the changes I agreed to make. After I know not how many struggles, useless efforts, and groanings, I decided to send it to the printing-house such as it was, or very nearly. To offer it to you in this condition seemed absurd, after what you had advised and I had promised. I have told you all this. My proofs have not yet returned to me. Perhaps I shall not even correct them till I am in Paris. A slight hope remains to me, but very feeble; for this wretched book, which left me too long ago, inspires in me now only great disgust.

To console myself for my powerlessness, I visited, two steps from my

own home, quite a curious little island (l'île de Ré); and I am thinking of a work which will take me out of my usual habits, and will amuse me by its novelty. I am just beginning it, and I will finish it this winter or later, when the painter takes his first rest.

Many formless notes, and the first pages of an article for the Review, are all that I shall have done here. I am ashamed of it. . . .

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

We will speak further on of these unpublished fragments concerning the Isle of Ré.

Jan. 9, 1863.

DEAR MADAME AND KIND FRIEND, — I have just been ill, and am still ailing. My wife was ill at the same time that I was, and now it is my daughter's turn. We have changed places, but the atmosphere of the house has not changed. Such impossibilities as these, that I can explain to you in two words, prevented my writing to you at the time I wished and should have written. I send you now, a week too late, to my great regret, and Heaven knows from what a gloomy infirmary, the good wishes of a friend whom you have overwhelmed with your kindness, and who is as grateful to you as possible for the deep attachment he experiences for you; for I know nothing rarer or completer in this world than being able to like unreservedly what one admires. Be so kind also as to say to your children, and those who are dear to you, that I wish them all sorts of happiness.

I have read "Plutus." It is exquisite. This modest imitation of the antique is the most original thing in the world, and the most *yourself*.

What a manner! what style! what character! what life and emotion in the simplicity of these antique lines! There are certain phrases of Bactis, and certain entrances of your beautiful and admirable Poverty, which have moved me even to tears. In the time we live in, — so unhealthy, mean, and disturbed, so full of little disputes about trifling interests, and vile ambitions



SKETCH OF THE ARABIAN FALCONER.

about the most miserable objects,—this might be called a lesson fallen from Heaven. Will it be understood and profited by? I know nothing more moving, more consoling, nor more persuasive. For my part, I thank you for it, as for a truly salutary emotion. To-morrow evening, if I am able, I shall pay another visit to Madame Buloz, and learn from her what is said of it at the office of the "Revue," where I have not been for a whole month, with which fact they must be delighted.

I see that I shall not be able to pay you my visit this winter. The Exposition has begun, and I am very much belated. I must accept this as I do other renunciations. Let us hope that it may be in the spring! Will you not come to Paris between now and then?

My "Dominique" appears to-morrow. Hachette has had a number of copies printed in octavo on suitable paper. The stitching of this edition for presentation, which I could not oversee, is not finished,—at least I have no copy of it. I will try to obtain one to-morrow, that you may have the first to appear, and that I may offer to you the first-fruits of this little book, which I have, according to your permission, dedicated to you.

There is nothing new concerning my work. Take this as a line from a convalescent. Forgive me, dear Madame, for this delay, which has made me so unhappy. May you be always well, and ever write for hearts eager for fine and healthy things. You are alone to-day in giving us beautiful examples of them in excellent books. EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

Jan. 27, 1863.

DEAR MADAME,—It is too absurd that you have not yet received this volume, which belongs to you in so many senses. It appeared on the 10th of this month, but full of enormous mistakes,—alterations made at the printing-house, after the first proofs, by some over-scrupulous corrector, who took the liberty of substituting phrases without meaning for certain audacities which probably were not to his taste. Everything had to be stopped, and these things cancelled. I had a few library editions printed of the cleanest,—if any are clean?—which I have this moment received. The first to be addressed

is yours. It shall be sent you to-morrow, with another for Maurice, and one for M. . . .

The dedication is cold and official. It says nothing either of what I owe to you, nor of the feelings I have for you. If the public has not been as well notified as I would have wished, it is because it seemed to me dangerous to avail myself beforehand of a friendship which might make it suspect me rather of pride than attachment. My real sentiments you know, I hope; and I entreat you, dear Madame, never to doubt them. There is a little of everything in the entire devotion with which you inspire me; and, between you and me alone, I shall not fear to rejoice and boast to the end of being your friend.

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

April 11, 1863.

DEAR MADAME AND FRIEND, — I have only just sent my pictures. This is to tell you that I am over-fatigued, although the result neither justifies so much labor nor so great fatigue. But it does not take great things to give a curvature to my mind. Right or wrong, I am very low. For three weeks I have wanted to write you every day.

You have been perfect for my friend Arthur B. This is like you, and I am not surprised, but I was very much touched by it. The author is intoxicated with joy. He admired and venerated you before; now he adores you. And I believe that, morning and night, he says his prayers to Couture's picture of you, which he has in his study before his working-table. May you inspire him in his talent and in his life! He has a spirit to comprehend you, — not only in what you do that is fine, but in those great and just and good things which you accomplish and recommend.

And you think that I cannot follow you so far as Mademoiselle La Quintinie. Ah! I have not a very strong mind. I know nothing; I think nothing. I scarcely dare to study certain vital questions in which my poor reason goes astray. I live in indolent doubt rather than terrify myself by courageous negations, or affirmations equal to acts: but when I find at last, in a work of great bravery, the exact programme of what I think to be the truth; when I see in

printed letters what my conscience has gently stammered for so many years; when the sanctity of the few things truly holy is preached to me; and when I am consoled while I am enlightened, and reassured while I am persuaded, — do not imagine that I hesitate. I will follow you with my whole soul wherever you go. Lead me as far as you will upon that road: I will go with closed eyes; for I am as sure as I exist that you are leading us all into the light. Your book is admirable; and what renders it irresistible is that it is wise, moderate, of perfect equity, with that equilibrium of reason which would tranquillize the most cowardly spirits. More passion would injure the profound effect, which might be called peaceful, that you produce upon the mind. I have heard it much talked of; public opinion is unanimous. You would even be greatly astonished at the followers you attract. People approve. They do not simply say it is fine, it is strong, it is handled with a master's hand: they say *it is true*. It is true that I select my society, and that in my world every one is on your side. I suspect that elsewhere some protest. You must know it; but I have not yet met one of your enemies. I know that O. F. pretends to be exasperated, — doubtless to conceal the intense pleasure that you give to his self-love by doing him such great honor.

I await with anxiety, less for the end of the story, that we think we may divine, than for the triumph of the just, and the defeat of Moreali. By what means, with what arms? What is so fine in it all is, that, in this struggle of souls against discipline, the weapons are the noblest and simplest, — movements of the heart, impulses of the mind; no ruses nor stratagems; discipline is terrifying; doctrine has a thousand subtle windings of conscience at its service. Two very loving hearts, two spirits little by little penetrated by the same desire to be free, are going to deliver each other, by the effort alone of expanding.

Excuse this verbiage, and only consider that I thank you for myself and others.

You say what many people have upon their lips, and what not one of them could say, for lack of the two rare privileges you possess, — genius and courage. . . .

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

Monday, after midnight.

Very dear Madame, — Here is at last a success![1] Are you glad of it? Have you enjoyed it as we did, who shared the emotion of the whole theatre? And have you received, while hidden in your corridor, the ovation which was addressed to you under your windows?



An exquisite piece; actors excellent almost without reserve or exception; a rare and marvellous lesson in taste, decency, nobility, naturalness, and true grandeur in simplicity; an audience sufficiently intelligent to recognize all that, and which seemed itself converted by applauding you. In fine,

[1] The great success of the "Marquis of Villemer."

the true power of genius recognized, exalted, and consecrated before *other powers,* which have shown no jealousy of it. This is an unique spectacle, such as I had never seen, and which we thank you for having furnished us.

We must not, then, vilify our time too much. The public has to-night redeemed itself from many follies and much lack of sympathy.

It is late; we shall return home, greatly touched.

Permit two friends who love you tenderly to close this deeply moving evening by saluting you respectfully, from the bottom of our hearts.

Eugène Fromentin.
Madame Fromentin.

CHAPTER VIII.



In spite of such encouragements, in spite of the pressing entreaties of the "Revue des Deux Mondes," Fromentin did not repeat his excursion into the domain of romance. He dreaded the reefs of repetition; paths little worn attracted him, and it was not in the novel that he could make great discoveries. Moreover, he had cherished for some time a project with which he frequently entertained his friends, especially Gustave Moreau and Ricard. He wished to write a kind of æsthetic and technical walk through the picture galleries of the Louvre, to study the methods of art in their purest and rarest sources, and in that study, which, according to his ambition, was to be a code of lofty criticism, to deposit his intimate thoughts upon art and the old artists, — upon those masters whom he had interrogated and loved with passion ever since his maturity, — as well as to formulate from the life all the conquests of his experience, and the whole fruit of his meditations. In

a word, to follow, in the presence of these masterpieces that no other museum in the world presents with such abundance and variety, — from Mantegna and Fra Angelico to Leonardo and Raphael, from Zurbaran to Velasquez, from Van Eyck to Rubens, from Frans Hals to Rembrandt and Metsu, from Clouet to Watteau, Prud'hon, and Delacroix, — the development of the ideas sketched in his "Programme of Criticism." This vast project was not realized; but it led him to write for the "Revue des Deux Mondes" the volume which he entitled "The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland,"[1] which is an ingenious compromise between the work of pure criticism he had dreamed of, and the forms of descriptive literature of which he had made such marvellous use in his two volumes of travels. To the analysis of picturesque phenomena in the "Sahara," then of moral phenomena in "Dominique," succeeded the analysis of æsthetic phenomena.

Were "The Old Masters," as might be supposed from the subtitle, "Belgium and Holland," but the first portion of a vaster edifice? I do not know. When it appeared, in rather unexpected fashion, Fromentin having written it in one heat in the space of a few months, the volume of "The Old Masters" had an immense success, which justified fully the independence of its views, the frankness of its opinions, and the novelty of its methods. The articles were eagerly read in the "Review" and discussed with excitement. Praise and blame were breathed with equal fervor in the press, in drawing-rooms, and in studios, — particularly studios.

It can be said of this book that it was long thought of and very

[1] Les Maîtres d'Autrefois : Belgique — Hollande.

quickly written. In this is its power. Fromentin, with his incomparable memory, worked and amassed within himself a great deal amid his daily labor. He had some difficulty in leaving the brush for the pen; he hesitated long, he seemed to choose his time with solicitude. But after he had made his decision, he proceeded unrestingly and rapidly towards the goal fixed upon. Thus he did with the "Sahara," the "Sahel," with "Dominique," and particularly with "The Old Masters," a work which in no way savors of improvisation. It is difficult to believe that these pages, often of such precision of form, of so delicate and choice arrangement, of so equal measure, can have been written in so impassioned a spirit. But it was so; and this is not one of the least remarkable characteristics of Fromentin's talent.

The notes that he had already collected concerning certain pictures in the Louvre, and those which he took with such enthusiasm during a trip which he made alone for several weeks, in July, 1875, through the principal towns of Belgium and Holland, were the origin of "The Old Masters."

A letter which he wrote, at the end of his stay in the Netherlands, to his friend Charles Busson, shows us how this journey for rest became a journey of work, and how the idea of the book, then indistinct, took body in his mind: —

BRUSSELS, Friday morning, July 30.

DEAR GOOD FRIEND, — My journey is over. I leave Brussels to-day at half-past six. This evening, a little after nine o'clock, I shall meet my family, — a moment we all await with impatience. This letter — promised and hoped

for, I know, and always delayed — will reach you at least with a foreign stamp; and if I have not kept my promise well, it shall not be said that I have failed to keep it altogether. I am not tired. I am better. I have even grown stout, I believe; and I am very much pleased with the country, the objects, the museums, and not too discontented with myself. I have not seen everything,



by a great deal, but I have seen, and thoroughly seen, the most important things. Brussels I have examined in detail twice (the Museum is well worth the trouble): also, I have been to Antwerp, the Hague, Amsterdam, Harlem, Ghent, Bruges, Mechlin; in fine, to whatever strangers visit, and a painter ought to study carefully. I have experienced surprises, astonishments, deceptions, and also have felt very hearty admiration. Rubens grows with every step one takes in this country, of which he is the most incontestable glory, and where he reigns preëminently. Rembrandt does not gain. Whatever may be said, and apart from certain admirable works, less talked of than the *famous* ones, he astonishes, shocks me a little, attracts, and does not convince me. These are the two great names, to which may be added Van Eyck and Memling, who, for their date, especially the last, are two geniuses.

Ruysdael, Cuyp, and Paul Potter are here what we know them to be, — first of their kind. Ruysdael particularly, by unexpected works of perfect beauty, is classed exceptionally, in the rank he ought to occupy, as the first landscape painter in the world, equal to, and perhaps before, Claude Lorraine. There is no Hobbema here to compare to him. Hals is undiscovered, and wholly exquisite. As to the small and charming Dutch school, it can be judged at Paris almost as well as on the spot, with the difference that here the degrees and ranks are more clearly established; and that such a man as Van de Velde, for instance, whom we might be tempted to put in the first class, only belongs to the second, and so on.

I have observed the country rather than visited it; but I know it and understand it well. I have passed my time in churches, museums, and private collections; and I may say that I have worked hard, very hard. Of a journey for rest I have made, as I feared I should, a journey of pure work; but this labor of an entirely new kind has rested me, by distracting my attention, which was the essential thing.

Shall I make better paintings for this? I do not believe I shall at all; but I shall have learned, and now know thoroughly certain parts of our art history which I reproached myself for not knowing.

Let it be well understood that I bring back nothing but abundant notes.

Shall I do anything with these notes and memories? I wished to do so, and believe that I shall. When? how? in what form? That I shall see during my vacation.

For certainly, after the critics, after the historians, even after the local historians, some of whom I have read, almost everything remains to be said, not concerning the life of the men, which is now very well and carefully studied, but concerning the nature, quality, and range of their talent.

There are so many errors and prejudices!

Except Papeleu, whom I met on Sunday at Ghent, and two or three La Rochelle people whom I found at Rotterdam and Amsterdam, not the shadow of an acquaintance, — oh, yes, Flameng, at the Hague. As to Luminais, we were not to follow the same route, or else he has always preceded me by a few

days. Portaels, who had seen your picture, and found it very much to his taste, promised me that it should be hung in a way worthy of it.

The Exhibition will open, I think, on the 25th. I have seen the buildings, but have not entered them.

I have met here with a welcome perfect in its grace and cordiality, and I have made very agreeable acquaintances for the future, in case I ever return.

Brussels is charming. No place is so charming for a sojourn as Brussels or the Hague, which latter is the most exquisite city that I know. They are all curious; some are mortally dull, except for the interest in their churches.

In short, I have done well to travel, and done well to come here. A journey elsewhere, in a country without art, would not have taken my thoughts from what occupies me, and would have taught me nothing. This has diverted my attention, and will probably give me an opportunity to say a word concerning the things I love, and that I believe I feel truly.

And you, dear friend, are you at work? How are you in mind and body? The season has been frightful; but now, I believe, at last, it is better. What news of your children? I will write you from Paris to tell you when I leave it, which will be, I think, in a few days.

Farewell. Forgive my long silence. My tenderest respects to your dear mother. As to you, *dear friends*, let me embrace all three of you as tenderly as I love you from the bottom of my friendly heart. EUGÈNE.

The immense pleasure caused him by the atmosphere of the two schools that he had long studied at Paris; this intimacy with the masters who, above all, had the greatest hold upon his tendencies as a painter; with those gods of the *pingebat;* with those simple-hearted men, so strong, so powerful, and so original; and especially that sudden revelation of some master types, of certain individualities of the first rank whom he scarcely knew but by reputation, — transformed itself for him into a stern labor. These note-books are a very

curious proof of it. His memory no longer sufficed him for recollections of such precision. All his impressions are registered with incessant scrupulousness. Pencil notes, taken on the very day, before pictures, buildings, and landscapes, or pen notes, written in the evening at the hotel, are packed together, compact, varied, full of lively attraction, clear, rapid; some very concise, and hardly intelligible for any one but himself; the others developed, and already written out. On his return he was to sift all these materials, — utilizing them for his book, or leaving them in reserve, according to the direction of his thoughts, erasing methodically, with a stroke of the pencil, all that he had utilized or transcribed. Many fragments remained unused, and we have read them with interest in his notebooks. He attached some value to them, since he had thought of publishing them as an appendix to a second edition of "The Old Masters," which, unfortunately, he had no time to do. I even think that he came near publishing the whole of his notes. It seemed to him that the vivacity of certain sensations and certain perceptions would become blunted in a new revision. I cannot permit myself to do what he alone could do, but I shall not forbid myself to gather certain waifs from the current of his experiences.

"The Old Masters" requires a profound examination. If I cannot accord to this book all the space I would wish, at least I will compel myself to place in relief some important points of view. I will also say, without timidity, what I think of its very bold judgments.

The preface must be read with attention, for we find in it an



STUDY FOR ONE OF THE FIGURES IN THE QUARRY.

Drawing by Eugène Fromentin.

acknowledgment that must be remembered, which places in a clear light the author's intentions.

"I have just been viewing," he says, "Rubens and Rembrandt in their own home, and the Dutch school in its unchanging frame of a life partly agricultural, partly sea-faring, — a life of downs, pastures, huge clouds, and low horizons. There are two very distinct arts here, perfectly complete, entirely independent of each other, and very brilliant, which require to be studied by one who is at the same time an historian, a thinker, and a painter." Of these three men, his modesty forbade him to admit that he was anything but the third. It is certain that in the very novel methods of criticism of "The Old Masters," the painter necessarily occupies the first place. The rare and curious side of the book is in his analysis of the works, which is so subtle that it becomes at times a kind of irreducible chemistry, or extreme physiology in the art of painting. But Fromentin is not only a painter who writes, he is also a thinker who seeks, in the data themselves of history, the reason for his opinions, and his opinions display always, it must be recognized, the courage of entire frankness.

"It is possible," acknowledges Fromentin, "that some of my views may conflict with received opinions. I do not seek, but I shall not avoid, the revisal of ideas that may result from these disagreements. I beg you not to see in this the evidence of a guerilla spirit which seeks to distinguish itself by its boldness, which, while travelling over beaten tracks, fears to be accused of having noticed nothing, if it does not judge differently from others." His ambition, after

confronting all the knowledge that bursts upon him before the pictorial marvels of Belgium and Holland, is to do something more special than what was done before him, — "wherein philosophy, æsthetics, nomenclature, and anecdote shall occupy less room, and matters of the craft much more; which shall be like a sort of conversation upon painting, wherein the painters may recognize their habits, wherein men of the world may learn to better understand painters and painting." This is certainly well expressed, and conveys with more precision than I could myself the character of "The Old Masters." The "matters of the craft" occupy in it, without apparent effort or the slightest pedantry, the leading place. This was a true novelty in the domain of art criticism.

Fromentin entered Belgium by Brussels. Let us snatch a slight sketch of it from a passage in his note-book: —

BRUSSELS, Tuesday, June 29.

Warm, splendid weather; a white, even light, wholly undisturbed, like that from the sky at Marseilles. Brussels is charming in its whiteness, its lustre, and its gayety, under this pitiless sunshine, and in this azure air, which turns everything blue in the shade, and makes everything sparkle that is illuminated by light. There is no wind in the trees of the park; gray Ste. Gudule is hardly outlined against the dusty color of the high and distant horizon of hills.

The book opens then with the Brussels Museum. This Museum, of moderate renown and modest celebrity, attracts his attention particularly. He finds that it is of more value than its fame. It is the Museum of a town which, though it has not witnessed the birth of any of the great men who are made manifest by their masterpieces

at Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp, has a right to be the preface and preparatory recapitulation of the art of Flanders. "It notifies us of what should be seen, prepares for everything, suggests everything, explains everything, and sets in order that confusion of proper names and works which are lost in the multitude of chapels where the chance of the time has disseminated them." Fromentin improved this occasion to cast a glance over the whole chain of the artistic history of Belgium. This chapter is excellently well considered, very subtle, and very just, especially in what touches upon the rather perplexing influence of Italy upon the artists of the North, at that singular period of transition, the whole talent of which would seem to have been wasted in the inflations of a Michael-Angelesque decadence, had it not led, by mysterious ways, to the flowering of a Rubens. I may say the same of the pages that the author consecrates to the two interesting figures of the masters of Rubens, — the eclectic Otto Vœnius and the fiery Van Noort. It is cursive and clear history, and makes one feel to the quick the advent of Rubens.

The Brussels Museum possesses a dozen pictures by the great Antwerp master. Fromentin stops before them with satisfaction, he extracts their substance, and receives in exchange the first disturbance caused him by the genius of this master. The fancy for declamation; the poetry, violent, and often conflicting with good taste; the contradictions and surprises; the mingling of beauty and ugliness; the unheard-of perfection by the side of shocking incorrectness; above all, the incomparable magic of execution which disarms all criticism, and veils in its splendor the digressions of

a torrent-like imagination; the power of invention and of unwearied labor, — all these trouble him, and are presented to his mind as a most redoubtable problem. "It is necessary," he said, "to find, outside of all comparisons, a place apart for this glory which is so legitimate. It must be found in the world of truth, which he traverses as a sovereign, and also in the world of the ideal, — that region of pure ideas whither his mind unceasingly bears him."

"It is not enough to look upon Rubens's pictures as a dilettante, with mind shocked and eyes charmed. There is something more to consider and to be said." This something he sought at Mechlin and Antwerp, and what he there found he certainly dared to write.

Rembrandt and Paul Potter furnished him at the Hague and Amsterdam with other distresses.

The celebrated picture of the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, preserved at Notre Dame at Mechlin, served him as a theme for studying Rubens's manner of painting. The *Miraculous Draught* is not a faultless Rubens, but its execution is very characteristic; and at the time that Fromentin saw it, it had the advantage of being unfastened, and on the level of his eye.

"Do not imagine that the picture I dwell upon is a finished specimen of the finest qualities of this painter. It is that in no respect. Rubens has frequently had a better conception, seen better, and painted much better; but the execution of Rubens, unequal as it is in results, scarcely varies in principle; and observations made concerning a mediocre picture are equally applicable, with even better reason, to the most excellent of his productions."

This whole passage, very much developed, is one of the most important in the book. Fromentin here openly grapples with one of those "matters of the craft" that no art critic would or did grapple with before him. I cannot refrain from quoting the first lines. They are characteristic, and of a very remarkable richness of form. They go to the heart of the matter.

"The difficulty is not to know how he worked, but to know how one can do so well in such a way. The means are simple, the methods elementary. It is on a fine, smooth panel, clean and white, over which has travelled a hand magnificently agile, adroit, sensitive, and steady. The impetuosity of which he is suspected is a manner of feeling rather than a disorderly way of painting. The brush is as calm in it as the soul is warm, and the spirit prompt to be impelled. There is in such an organization so exact a connection, and such rapid relations between vision, sensitiveness, and the hand, such perfect obedience of the one to the others, that the habitual shocks of the brain which directs might seem the bursts of the instrument. Nothing is more deceptive than this apparent fever, restrained by profound calculation, and served by a mechanism practised in every exercise. It is the same with the sensations of the eye, and consequently with the choice he makes of colors. The colors are also very simple, and appear so complicated only on account of the results the painter draws from them, and the part he makes them play. Nothing can be more limited than the number of primary tints, nor more studied than the manner in which they are opposed; nothing also is more simple than his way of shading them, nothing more unexpected than the results he produces from them."

Fromentin continues thus with the same secure analysis, and, according to his own expression, in a mixed language, half of music and half of painting, because the plastic language has means too limited to express such delicate shades of ideas, and drags from Rubens, one by one, the secrets of his prodigious power. We find that by slight accents repeated, he has drawn a portrait in striking relief.

"Consider, moreover," he says, in closing, "that this unparalleled dexterity; this careless skill in playing with unwieldy materials and rebellious instruments; this fine movement of a well-managed tool; this elegant way of letting it travel over free surfaces; the impulse that escapes from it, the sparks that seem to fly from it, — all the magic of great workmen, which in others turns either into manner or affectation, or a pure spirit of mediocrity, — in him is only (I repeat it till you weary of it) the exquisite sensibility of an admirably healthy eye; a hand marvellously submissive; and, finally, of a soul truly open to all things, — happy, confident, and great. I defy you not to feel, even in the manias, the faults, I was even about to say in the trivialities, of this noble spirit, the marks of incontestable grandeur. And this exterior mark — the last seal set upon his thought — is the imprint of the hand itself."

This view of the whole having been taken, he reaches Antwerp, and attacks the mass of Rubens's work, which expands here in most diverse manifestations. The first aspect of Antwerp moves him to the bottom of his soul. The Queen of the Scheld is, in effect, one of the most *speaking* towns of Europe. For my part, I do not



FIRST IDEA OF THE PICTURE OF THE QUARRY.

Fac-simile of a drawing by Eugène Fromentin.

know one which, in its aspect, better proclaims its history and its genius. An unpublished sketch from Fromentin's notes gives us a superb impression of it: —

ANTWERP, Sunday.

Frightful weather! — rain, wind, gusts, all whirling about the spires, and engulfed in the funnels of the little streets leading to the quays. It is black, white, harsh, strident, and glacial. The pavement, roofs, slates, wet panes, all shine as if in the revolving gleam of an electric light. A dazzling burst of sunshine is seen in the midst of a shower. It is like lightning. Darkness succeeds it. And the clouds, which mark by their wild course the swiftness of the wind, are torn, renewed, heaped up, and seem to pass over each other like waves. The wind comes from the Scheld, across its flat banks, ruffles the river, rocks the boats, makes the cables creak, the dishevelled trees rustle, and the great steam chimneys groan more loudly, as the smoke surges out and streams back from the opening of their pipes. Looking westward down the river, only a vague horizon is seen, and a menacing fog composed of rain, foam, and wind.

On the opposite side, lofty clouds, projected perpendicularly upon the upper sky, accumulate in mountains; and upon this gray curtain, faintly fringed with white, is drawn the old church, with its rusty colors; and the immense tower — carved, eccentric, lighter below, blacker at the summit — springs to the height of three hundred feet, with its vast golden dial half way from the base.

It is "a Gothic Piranesi, made extravagant by the fancy of the North."

But Fromentin does not linger to contemplate this picture. He is impatient to enter Notre Dame. There are the celebrated masterpieces of Rubens, — the *Elevation of the Cross* and the *Descent from*

the Cross. He discusses their value with the more care, but at the same time with the more independence and courage, because they have until now been accepted without reserve, and consecrated by universal admiration. He strips himself of all preconceived ideas, and takes them as if he had just discovered them. His conclusions are wonderfully clear, and of great breadth of insight. To begin with, he greatly prefers the *Elevation of the Cross*, as being of a more personal and more Flemish inspiration. In his eyes, the *Descent from the Cross*, painted on Rubens's return from Italy, is entirely impregnated with classic memories, from the study of the severe and symmetrical masters of the Peninsula. *Romanism* is manifest in it, but not without permitting the bursting forth of the youthful maturity of his genius, which disports itself at ease in the midst of acquired formulas. And, according to the author of the "Old Masters," "Is it not to this fine Italian flavor that the *Descent from the Cross* owes the greater part of its immense popularity?" The real greatness of Rubens appears only in certain parts, — in the inert and drooping body of Christ, in the admirable face of the Magdalen, whose opulent beauty already conveys the enduring ideal of the painter, and especially in the delicious panel of the Visitation. The execution is "smooth, compact, and prudent;" the lights are "arrayed in great masses;" the "half-tints are limited." "The canvas is sombre, in spite of the lights and the extraordinary whiteness of the shroud. Notwithstanding its relief, the painting is flat. It is a picture with blackish undertones, upon which are arranged large, firm lights, without any shading. The coloring is not very rich; it is full,

sustained, clearly calculated to be effective from a distance. He constructs the picture, frames it, expresses its weakness and its strength, and does not seek to embellish it." Thus writes Fromentin. According to certain conventional methods, Rubens has never done better; according to his own, he has had many higher flights.

On the other hand, what spring, what audacity, what force, what originality, what depth of coloring, what vibrating warmth, the *Elevation of the Cross* displays! How his very incorrectness shows us the real Rubens! Rubens will perhaps go higher, but he will go no farther.

It seems that his personality, as one advances into Belgium, becomes more colossal, more overwhelming. The Antwerp Museum, so rich in Flemish treasures of diverse epochs, is still, in the eyes of Fromentin, Rubens, and Rubens alone. Rubens inspires him with a passion, absorbs him, even with all the defects which he underlines at every step. The *Adoration of the Magi* is one of his most glowing improvisations; the *Lance Thrust* is a picture "disconnected, with great holes, roughnesses, vast masses of rather arbitrary character, beautiful in themselves, but of doubtful relation;" the *Trinity*, "a pleasing beginning, cold, thin, smooth, and faded." His *Christ in the Manger* is still more mediocre and empty; the *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, unworthy of him; the *Education of the Virgin* is "the most charming decorative fancy ever seen, of a tenderness and incomparable richness in its sweetness;" the *Virgin of the Paroquet* is a beautiful, almost impersonal, memory of Italy. But the masterpiece, the most astonishing masterpiece of all, never to be forgotten,

and deeply touching, the one that does highest honor to the genius of Rubens is the *Communion of St. Francis of Assisi.* Then Fromentin, in a few fiery pages, among the most beautiful that he has ever written, in language sober, ardent, and expressive, carries us along with him, making us penetrate deeply into the moral and plastic value of this creation, the most exceptional of all his works, and one exceptional in the art of all periods. "When this unequalled work, in which Rubens is transfigured, has been long examined, one can look at nothing and no one else, neither others nor Rubens himself."

In the following chapter Fromentin asks himself a new and interesting question, — Is Rubens a great portrait painter; is he only a portrait painter? A very close argument leads him to a negative reply. In his portraits, as elsewhere, Rubens is a startling workman. The painter of the *Chapeau de Paille,* in the National Gallery, has put into them, perhaps, his most seductive attraction, and yet, as a whole, his portraits remain "weak, not closely observed, superficially constructed, and, moreover, of but slight resemblance." Rubens "lacked that attentive simplicity, at once submissive and skilful, which the study of the human face demands for perfection." All his women belong to the same family; they have "a fresh complexion, a rounded forehead, large temples, small chins, prominent eyes, the same coloring, an almost identical expression, a beauty pertaining to their time, a plumpness belonging to the races of the North, with a grace that belongs to Rubens himself." *Marie de Medici* resembles Isabel Brandt, and the *Infanta Isabella* Helen Fourment. There is

much elegance of form, as well as spirit and health; "the painting is rapid and brilliant; there is an agreeable resemblance;" but nothing particular which "arrests, seizes, gives cause for reflection, and is not to be forgotten. There is not one plain feature, not one thin contour, not one startling singularity, in any trait." Imagine Holbein with the patrons of Rubens, and you will see appear all the difference between conventionality, however beautiful, and truth. In fine, Rubens, as a portrait painter, has been, according to Fromentin, "a mirror rather than a penetrating instrument," while the reality of the types of his finest compositions, when he is dominated by the idea of expressing them, shows him an observer of human nature of incomparable power and depth. The ravishing portrait sketch of *Helen Fourment and her Two Children*, at the Louvre, alone finds grace in the eyes of Fromentin. I should be less exclusive, and should join to it some choice works like the superb portrait of a man in the Munich Museum.

The apotheosis of Rubens is at his tomb in St. Jacques. The *St. George*, as the work of a painter, is the pearl of Rubens's casket. It is resplendent with all the fortuitous conjunctions which form successful and choice works; in short, perfect works. It remains to us as the purest essence of Rubens's genius. Every one will agree with Fromentin, who devotes to it a whole chapter. I quote from his notes: —

St. George. — Decidedly the rarest work of Rubens. In workmanship (it is small, — two metres at the outside) the most incisive, the best drawn, the most ardent, and the most capricious as an autograph. It is scratchy

and flat, broad and delicate. Search memory in vain, there are other kinds of art, but none better. A rare, unrivalled coloring, a handling which alters nothing and enriches everything. It is a diamond.

And, farther on: —

One admirable thing in this man is, that when he wishes to move you, probably when he is moved himself, he sways you with faces, eyes, mouths, features, the sparkle of an eye, the teardrop gleaming like a pearl upon an eyelash.

Here the author, in presence of this majestic tomb, rises little by little to the tone of history. He judges Rubens as a whole, in a few



decided expressions, and traces, of his person and his work, a full, condensed, vivid picture. His judgment is summed up in a word. Rubens is a lyric painter, the most lyrical of all.

Let our friend Paul Mantz, who is preparing a life of Rubens for the "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," hearken to the appeal that Fromentin seems to have destined for him, when he asks that this exemplary life shall be written by some man of great learning and large heart, for the honor of our art, and for the perpetual edification of those who practise it.

CHAPTER IX.



AFTER a short and brilliant sketch of the figure of Vandyck, Fromentin enters upon the subject of Holland.

The Hague, that exquisite city — half-Dutch, half-cosmopolitan, elegant without affectation, individual without eccentricity, comfortable in the English fashion, aristocratic without stiffness, royal by all its traditions and customs, but liberal at the same time, calm and restful in the highest degree, with admirable environs and the sea close at hand — was formed more than any other town in the world to fill the nature of Fromentin with enthusiasm. He traces of it a picture of great truth of tone and extreme delicacy. He would almost be glad to live there. "It is a residence that I would recommend to those whom the ugliness, platitude, racket, shabbiness, or the vain luxury of all things, have disgusted with great cities, but not with towns. And as to me, if I had to choose a place

for work, a pleasure-house where I could be at my ease, breathing a delicate atmosphere, seeing pretty things, dreaming of fairer ones, especially if I were a victim of cares, vexations, and difficulties with myself, and needed tranquillity to settle them, and something charming around me to calm them, I would do as Europe does after its storms; I would here establish my Congress."

In another passage not less delicious, he shows, like a light decoration steeped in shadow and melancholy, a view of the Hague in the evening with the Vijver in the foreground, the stiff quays, the black palaces, the motionless trees, the deserted alleys, the brick houses, the slate roofs, perfect silence, profound repose. As night falls, "the pond gleamed almost imperceptibly, like the remains of twilight forgotten in a nook of the city." He ends by a delightful sketch in the manner of Van Goyen, of the *Sea at Scheveningen*. "Before you lies the North Sea, flat, gray, receding, and covered with white caps. The grass is faded; the downs pale; the beach colorless; the sea milky; the sky silky, cloudy, wonderfully aerial, well drawn, well modelled, and well painted, as they used to paint it in old times. The darks in it are solid; the whites delicious, simple, and fat. The light is excessive, and the picture lifeless. Nothing could be more variegated, and the whole effect is dreary. Red is the sole vivid color which preserves its activity in this astonishingly subdued scale, of which the notes are so rich, while the tone remains grave."

The whole essence of Dutch art is in this and in the country landscape about the Hague. Fromentin draws from them a happy

explanation of the beginning of this art. According to his custom he arrives by the most winding paths at his purpose to limit their essential characteristics, and to set them in relief. We find excessive probity and a complete absence of literature. Before this school, so diverse in its harmonious unity, so simple, so sincere, so wholly made up of painters, so indifferent to the *subject*, so far removed from the conventional, and yet so attached to its ideal, — he no longer feels himself at ease: his artist soul is all thrilled, and undergoes the charm of this art, "which seems to think only of painting well." This is for him the true field of exploration and discovery. At bottom, nothing attracts him more, or speaks to him in clearer or more touching language.

The picture traced by Fromentin of this prodigious expansion of art throughout nearly a whole century, of its causes, its origin, its climatic and physiological conditions, of its general signs, — in a word, of its genius, — is excellent, and leads to meditation. He particularizes very ingeniously. With the exception of Rembrandt and his school within a certain limit, all these artists are dedicated to the study of the picturesque; they are strangers to a moral interest, disdaining most absolutely what we call the subject, which, ever since Greuze, has been the almost exclusive aliment of our art. They love painting in itself and for itself; they paint to paint, and that suffices. But also what extraordinary painters are Metsu, Cuyp, Hals, Brauwer, the Van Ostades, Van Goyen, Pieter de Hoogh, Ruysdael, and all those others whose names are scarcely known, or are revealed to us only by one or two works like that Saenredam who painted the *Protestant Temple*, at the Turin Museum.



MOUNTED ARABS IN THE HILLS.

The great interest of the "Old Masters" is for me, in the judgments which the author's experience in painting, and his taste practised in delicate research, cause him to express concerning the principal Dutch masters. He is not a pedant, though he is very subtle. He has courage to utter his thoughts, without at all abandoning his accustomed prudence of form. As a critical result, nothing can be more original and curious.

Paul Potter first presents himself. "With the exception of the *Anatomical Lecture* and the *Night Watch*, Paul Potter's *Bull* is the most celebrated thing in Holland." The disillusioning of Fromentin is on that account all the greater. At the present valuation of works of art *The Bull* is priceless, and yet it is a poor picture: it is the youthful error of a painter who, by certain masterpieces of unequalled perfection, such as the *Small Inn* at the Louvre, and *Rest by the Barn* in the Arenberg gallery, painted just before his death (in 1653), remains one of the three or four greatest painters in Holland, the most simple, sincere, and honest of the school, with the exception of Ruysdael. The immense reputation of the *Bull* comes from an error. People have determined to see in it an exceptional painting, a model to be copied and followed: whereas it is only the study in which a hand still unpractised has sought, with extremest patience and most perfect good faith, to solve certain problems in art. In the first place, as a picture, Paul Potter's *Bull* justifies the harshest judgment. This judgment occasioned much remark and we transcribe it in these terms. "The work is ugly; it is not carefully conceived: the painting is monotonous, thick, heavy, leaden-hued, and

dry; the formula for it is one of the poorest. Unity is lacking in this picture, which begins no one knows where, and does not end at all; receives the light without being illumined by it, and distributes it at random; escapes on all sides, and comes out of its frame from being painted so entirely on the surface of the canvas. It is crowded without being filled. Neither the lines, nor the color, nor the distribution of effect, give it the first conditions of existence indispensable to any well-regulated work. The animals are ridiculous from their size. The tawny cow with a white head is built of some hard substance; the sheep and the ram are moulded in plaster. As to the shepherd, nobody defends him." The sky alone merits some praise.

As a study, on the contrary, the work calls in his eyes for an attentive examination, and becomes very interesting. "It is the ingenuous production" of a hand which is seeking its way, the application of a "conscience burdened with scruples," the "solitary labor" of a meditative soul. It is a great study, too great from the point of view of good sense, but not too great for the research of which it was the object, or for the instruction the painter was to gain from it. In a word, it is an astonishing evidence of candor and good faith.

"A huge bull in a vast plain, a great sky with scarcely any horizon, — what better occasion for a student to learn once for all a crowd of things very difficult to know, and to know them as they are by rule and measure? The movement is simple: none was necessary. The gesture is true, the head admirably living. The animal has its age, its type, its character, temperament, length, breadth, muscles, bones, ligaments, rough or smooth hide, curled or straight hair, loose



STUDY FOR THE WOMEN OF THE OULED-NAYLS

Sketch by Eugène Fromentin.

or light skin, all in perfection. The head, eye, chest, fore-quarters, are, from a simple and strong point of view, a very rare piece of work, — perhaps unequalled. I cannot say that the material is beautiful, nor that its color is well chosen ; matter and color are here too visibly subordinate to his preoccupation with form to expect much in this particular, when the draughtsman has given everything or almost everything in another."

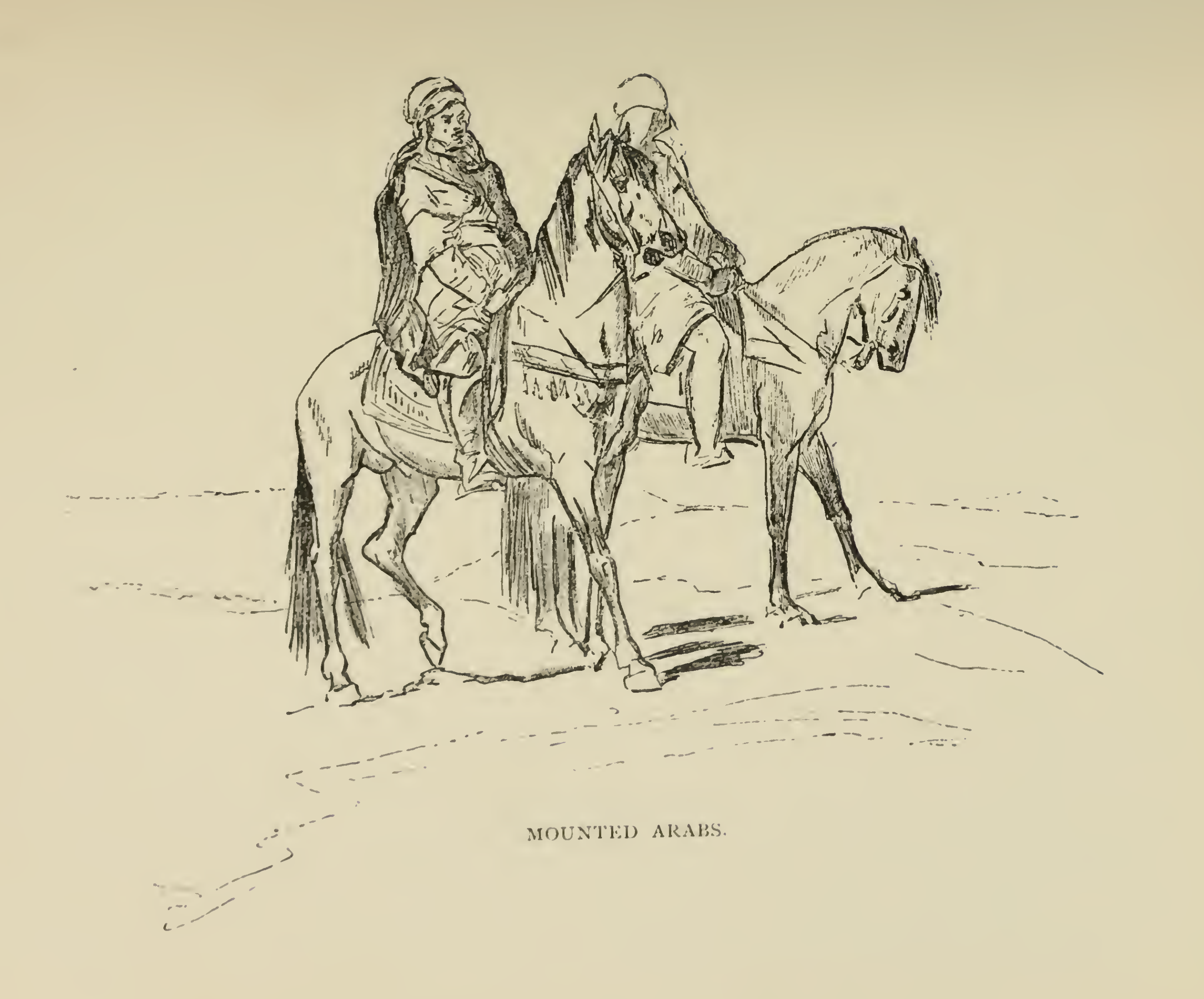
Until the last years of his short existence, Paul Potter, who learned everything from nature, without masters or advice, seemed to paint only studies; hence the inequality, and disconnected character of most of his pictures, which have surprising portions, but lack general effect. After having signed some unique masterpieces, such as the three little pictures in the Louvre, the Arenberg gallery, and the Pinacothek at Munich, he seems to fade away like an ephemeron, in a last effort at production, leaving of himself, in the firmament of Dutch art, but the softest and most melancholy image.

From Paul Potter, by logical transition, Fromentin passes to three lesser masters who are great painters, — Terburg, Metsu, and Pieter de Hoogh. To judge them better, he leaves Holland and returns to the Louvre, where it is always well to return when one speaks of Dutch art. I am entirely of his opinion when he says, " With some rare lacks, — such as some painter who is absolutely wanting to us, or another whose best work we do not possess (it would be but a short list), — the Louvre offers us, concerning the gist of the school, its spirit, its character, its perfection, its diversity of styles, with one exception, — the Corporation or Regent pictures, — an historical epitome almost

complete, and consequently an inexhaustible fund of study. Also I have believed," he adds farther on, "and it is an opinion that is here confirmed, that some one would render us a great service in writing for us a journey through the Louvre; or even less, a journey through the Salon Carré; or less still, a simple journey through a few pictures, among which might be chosen, I suppose, Metsu's *Visit*, Terburg's *Soldier and Young Woman*, and Pieter de Hoog's *Dutch Interior*."

Fromentin makes a picturesque analysis of these with extreme lightness of hand. In passing, he defines an expression very fashionable now-a-days, employed a little perhaps without comprehending its meaning, — *values;* and the definition is very clear. The value of a tone is the quantity of brightness or darkness, shadow or light, which is originally contained in it. The whole art of the colorist is in this knowledge, and in employing the exact relation of values in tones, that is, in the quantity of the coloring principle of each tone, influenced or completed by the neighboring tones. In the eyes of Fromentin, Corot, among the moderns, is the painter who had the clearest and happiest feeling for values. Among the ancients Velasquez and Rembrandt have in this direction surpassed all the others. Metzu, Ostade, Pieter de Hoogh, and the Dutch painters in general, made incomparable use of them. What masterpieces they have executed with a few dull undertones, with almost monochromatic shades, — "black, gray, brown, and white tinged with bitumen!"

A charming passage from his notes gives us a development of his definition.



MOUNTED ARABS.

There are in the diversity of objects, in their simplicity more apparent than real, questions of limit, of modelling, of coloring, which are curious and I may say lofty problems, if one remembers that the art of saying things well is half the art of thinking well, and almost all the art of feeling. If the charming painters of the Familiar School, such as Pieter de Hoogh, Metzu, Terburg, — to mention only painters of interiors and conversations, as they are called, — are sometimes perfect masters, it is precisely because they, in a secondary way, accomplished miracles of chiaroscuro without neglecting anything. With them, when the work is fine, everything can be seen, and all the better when the appearance is a little doubtful. The picture becomes clearer in proportion as it is duller in hue. It gains at the same time in depth and relief what it loses in brilliancy of surface. The more veiled the form, the more true and exquisite it is when closely studied. The distant modelling with them, is the finest. The color of a fabric, the gleam of dead gold, the hair, a fair hand against white satin or gold, a plume upon a hat with only one or two feathery sprays perceptible, a curtain behind, a carpet in a corner, a receding floor, jewelry, guitars, — all these are executed with precision, and well accented; they gain color, delicacy, and the impalpable beauty of living objects in proportion as the atmospheric envelope causes their crudities to disappear. In a word, it is nature itself viewed in a peculiar way, seen at a distance, and perceived by a sensitive eye, which can see beautifully while seeing exactly. That it is also truthful is another thing. There is between what we see with our eyes, and what the painter translates for us, exactly the intermediate space between the real and the transfigured. A fine painter sees for us things as they occur, and reproduces them for us in the condition of a work of art. All human sentiments belong to us all, — all the passions and all absurdities. We like, however, to have them translated for us, on condition that they are recognizable and true. A curtain rises, and you see upon the stage and in special circumstances the *Misanthrope*, *Hamlet*, the *Cid*, etc., — good painters do no more. Of a naked woman they make *Antiope;* of the mistress of an Italian duke, *La Joconda;* of a baker's wife, the *Dresden Madonna;* of a feast of great Venetian lords they make the *Marriage of*

Cana; and you may say of a group of arquebusiers they make the *Night Watch.*

The meeting with Ruysdael has the importance of an event in Fromentin's eyes. The masterpieces of the Louvre, the *Bush*, the *Gleam of Sunshine*, *The Storm*, the *Little Landscape*, perfect as they are — had given no sufficient idea of him; for of all the Dutch painters, Ruysdael is most intimately and nobly allied to his country. Ruysdael is Holland itself. "He has its breadth, sadness, rather dreary placidity, and its monotonous and tranquil charm. He has other claims to be the loftiest figure of the School after Rembrandt, which is no slight glory for a painter who has made only landscapes and not one living being, at least without some one's aid." Hobbema, whom he had only known by the *Mill* at the Louvre, "a truly superior work," here bears no comparison. This would perhaps be too much to say in presence of the Hobbemas of the English galleries.

Fromentin admires Ruysdael with enthusiasm, almost without restriction, and makes a superb study of him. He even returns to it twice, at length. The reputation of Ruysdael, established in the seventeenth century, needed no advocate; but the reason for the charm he has always exercised might be demanded.

"Considering him in his natural habit, he is simple, serious, robust, very calm and grave, habitually the same to such a point that his merits cease to impress. His color is monotonous, strong, harmonious, and not very rich. It varies only from green to brown; a layer of bitumen is its basis. It has little brilliancy, is not always agreeable, and in its first essence is not of very exquisite quality. A



WOMEN OF THE TRIBE OF THE OULED-NAYLS.

Sketch by Eugène Fromentin.

refined painter of interiors could easily find fault with the parsimony of his materials, and would sometimes judge his palette too simple." And yet Ruysdael is unique: every time that he is seen near a Van Goyen, a Wynants, a Van der Neer, even a Cuyp, all more truly painters than he, he advances to the first rank. Why? Because Ruysdael is a great mind, "because he is a soul of noble race, which has always something of importance to say." In a word, because there is in each of his works a thought, a conception, and also "a balance which makes the unity and perfection of his works."

"You perceive in his pictures an air of fulness, certainty, and profound peace, which is characteristic of himself." . . . Ruysdael paints as he thinks; healthily, strongly, broadly. . . . There is in this sober, careful, rather proud painting I know not what sorrowful haughtiness which faintly betrays itself. . . . A canvas of Ruysdael is a whole in which is felt an arrangement, a comprehensive view, a master intention . . . a need of constructing and organizing, of subordinating detail to the whole, color to effect, interest in objects to the plane they occupy." To all these most rare gifts he adds the deepest feeling for the poetry of nature, for its melancholy and its serenity, and to express it he uses the strongest and severest language,—something analogous to the fine French prose of the seventeenth century. Fromentin very justly remarks that Ruysdael is among the three or four Dutch painters whose personality is interesting, whom one would like to know and with whose habits we would wish to be acquainted.

Ruysdael, he says in his unpublished notes, is decidedly and by far the greatest landscape painter in Holland, and in the world, except Claude Lor-

raine in the real, and Poussin in the ideal. With Rubens in Flanders he is the one of all the painters who asserts himself most decidedly. He must be seen among his compatriots, his contemporaries, and his friends. Wherever he is seen he distinguishes himself and leaves a mark and sign. He is grave, lofty, learned, deeply feeling, reflective, self-contained, severe, and charming in the delicate parts of his works. His eye is more attentive and sensitive than any other; quick to seize shades, to make them apparent, to cause them to express what they do express; depth, distance, interposed atmosphere, the more subtle values which distinguish one from the other objects of almost the same appearance. He conceives, arrays, constructs; he makes the sky move by its volume and color. He makes it live, spreads it over the country, exactly in the plane to correspond with the terrestrial plane: finally he colors better than any one, in the sense that no other employs such learned and true relations of tones. Simple, ingenuous, profound, reserved, never uselessly adroit, but always skilful, — this man has every gift, every instinct, and all the learning of a great mind and a great painter.

One of his masterpieces is at the Van der Hoop Museum at Amsterdam: this is the *Windmill*. A fragment of the note-books makes it pass before our eyes.

A bit of the Meuse or the Zuyder Zee, the mill on the right, high in the canvas, on a rising ground with trees and houses. A stockade. The foreground is dull water, a little bit of dim horizon, a great sky filled with clouds, rising straight one above the other. There is one sole luminous spot in the gray clouds. The sky underneath is pale blue. It is grand, square, grave, powerful, — of incomparable beauty for its value of detail, and the tone of the whole. It is marvellous in its frame; one of the finest works I know. He is one of the grandest of painters. What simplicity and attractiveness! There is a little boat with a sail; pale white and of the rarest value, on the horizon.

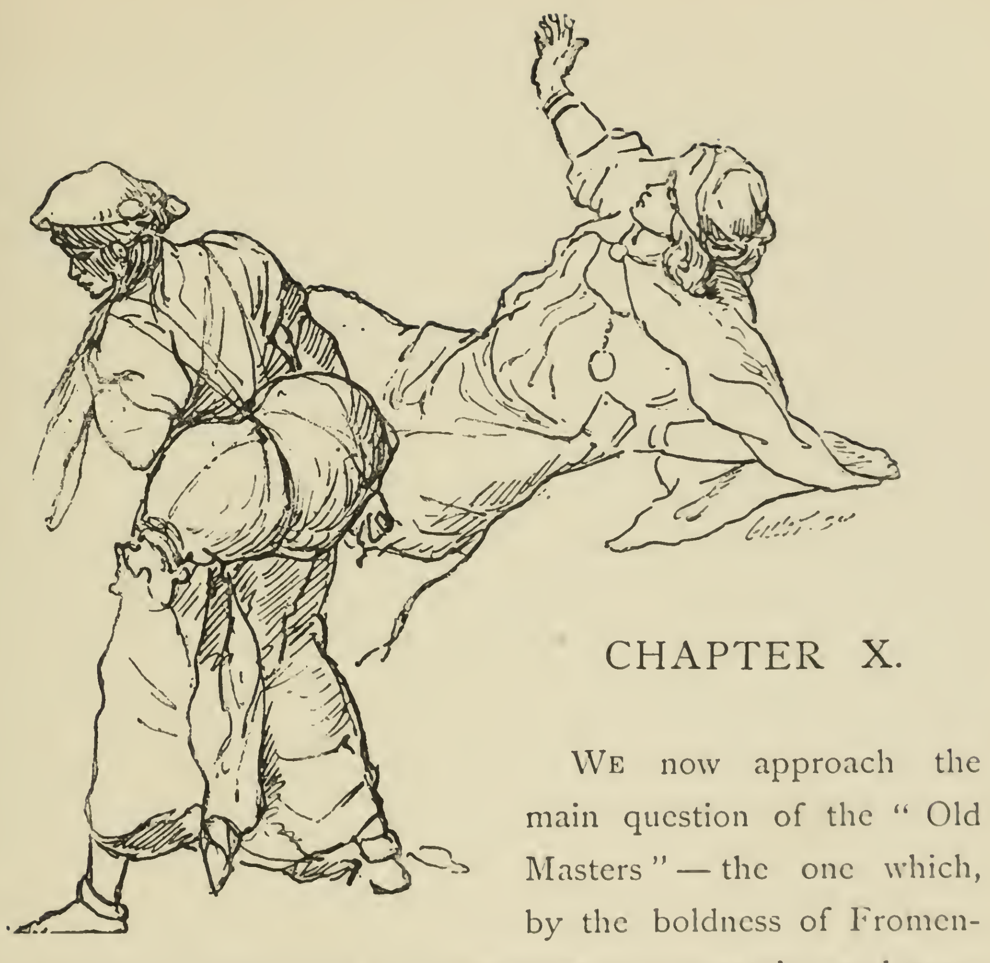
After a rapid turn towards the noble figure of Albert Cuyp, "a very fine painter," as he qualifies him, always happy, almost always

equal, universal, absolutely Dutch, — without, however, having created either a style or an art, like Rembrandt, Paul Potter, or Rüysdael, — he returns to the latter to seek the degree of influence that Holland has had upon our contemporary school. This chapter is very curious, as might be expected. I will only refer to the judgment he ex-



presses about Rousseau, the creator of what he calls the Sensational School, in his relations to Ruysdael. For the rest, Fromentin seems to me to have exaggerated the importance of these distant influences.

and the decree by which he condemns the new tendency to naturalism will doubtless appear to kindly spirits very sweeping and very severe. Fromentin, justly preoccupied with defending the immortal rights of the ideal, — everything that has soul, feeling, invention in art, — did not live long enough; and we ourselves will doubtless not live long enough to know truly what there is new and fruitful in this movement which is accentuating itself little by little, and which, as may be foreseen, will soon be irresistible.



CHAPTER X.

We now approach the main question of the "Old Masters" — the one which, by the boldness of Fromentin's opinions, has given rise to the warmest controversies, and even, in a certain camp, to implacable wrath. This is Rembrandt.

Fromentin dares to say what he thinks of a kind of admiration which is made to order, and to touch upon certain superstitions: he is not at all influenced by fetichism. This is a grave offence in the eyes of certain people. As for me, even if he were mistaken, I rank this critical independence of his as one of his highest claims to consideration. Who knows? — perhaps it would have been more easy to forgive him, if, instead of keeping within the bounds of his very

prudent and polite manner, he had proclaimed the truth he believed in by breaking everybody's windows.

At the Hague Rembrandt appears at first with two pictures: one, much esteemed among his early works, *St. Simeon*; the other, the very celebrated *Anatomical Lecture*.

Fromentin's conclusion is clear. The *Anatomical Lecture* is a commonplace work, a work feeble in itself, especially considering "its extraordinary celebrity." I have only to quote his words. The general tone is "neither cold nor warm — it is yellowish;" the execution is "thin and lacks warmth;" the effect is "salient without being strong." The corpse "is swollen, and not well constructed." It is not even a dead body. It has neither the beauty nor the hideousness of one; neither its accidental characteristics nor its terrible accents." It is true that in defence of Rembrandt it may be called a theatrical corpse. But it is in itself only "an effect of pale light in a black picture." The personages, except a few accessory figures, are insignificant in design and expression. The sole real merit of the work is simply that it marks a stage in the career of the painter, being, from its date (1632) a point of departure, and almost the first formal example of his chiaroscuro. On the way from the Hague to Amsterdam Fromentin stops to salute Franz Hals, the glorious painter of Harlem.

In spite of the frightful weather, with rain falling incessantly, I am pleased with my trip to Harlem. Franz Hals is well worth a special visit. It is impossible to learn to know him elsewhere, and he is a man who must not be spoken of without knowing him well. Not a great man but a charming and skilful painter, very original in his manner. . . . .

Truly a charming painter, even a great painter of nature. It is easy to understand the favor he now enjoys with artists in France, where we are returning to realities, and where what is most exact is adopted as the most beautiful. I am afraid that his errors are equally relished and vaunted, or that, pell mell and without discernment, they are accepted out of regard for his rare merits. This would be an error and an injustice. He has worked charmingly, exquisitely, even strongly; sometimes he has done poorly, even very badly.

Franz Hals is to Harlem what Velasquez is to Madrid. Here only can this astonishing virtuoso, who is only a virtuoso, be known. Everything Fromentin says of him seems indisputable to me. He admires him as much as any one for his very rare qualities, but his delicate sense reacts against this infatuation of recent date, which is certainly excessive and not very discriminating. He is right in saying that his method serves as a programme for certain doctrines by virtue of which the most literal exactness is wrongly mistaken for truth, and the most perfectly careless practice taken as the last word of knowledge and taste. Hals is not a thinker, but he surely has extraordinary talent, the most extraordinary in Holland. "There is no practical problem which he has not attacked, unravelled, and solved, and not one perilous exercise of which he has not made a habit."

Fromentin finally touches upon Amsterdam. He is in the heart of Dutch art and Dutch nature. What opulent matter for his mind eager for observation! His notes preserve delicious pictures for us produced by a few strokes of a light brush. It is to be regretted that he did not correct and develop them in his book.

The country is an etching by Rembrandt. Here is a bit of horizon by Paul Potter, with a herd; then a great sky by Ruysdael, from the *View of Harlem*, I think, with bleacheries and linen stretched on the fields in the foreground. These are the environs of Amsterdam, — Amsterdam and Harlem.

There are woods which are Holland; there are the sandy downs overlooking a dreary beach, with a rough and white-capped sea; there are the boats without sails — heavy boats supported on each side by their floats, which are also Holland: but Holland flat, wet, grassy, conquered from the sea, hardly dry, and still receiving on the edge of its pastures the flux and reflux of the tides by the multifarious arteries of its canals. This is the Holland of the Zuyder Zee.

First a great town that you leave behind, which touches the country with its rustic suburbs, its mills, its canals no longer enclosed with quays, but bordered with tow-paths and reeds; then suddenly come meadows — meadows and then fields as far as the encircling horizon; canals which shut them in, fences that enclose them; sheep, cattle; fine milch cows, all black and white, some all black, rarely all white, more often spotted with half mourning; like the meadows, fat, clean, shining, and peaceable, apparently asleep whether standing or lying; one bull only, apart in a closed paddock. Horses with long legs, long floating tails, cruppers rather sloping, bellies hanging, noses curved, large hairy feet. They are black or dark bay, of gloomy color. They are ungainly, moving with long slow steps, rubbing themselves against the fences, and standing there immovable with their heads to the horizon, looking into the neighboring pasture without seeing it. The high wind, which blows freely over the vast plains, bristles their manes and intermingles the long hairs of their tails. A navigable canal traverses the pastures on a level with the soil, — wet boats, sail boats, boats towed against the wind.

Afar, a little oasis of stunted trees, sorrowful and dark, surrounding a tiny farm house. The red roof gleams through the sombre foliage. On the edge of the canal are wooden huts of the poorest appearance. Four or five willows around them, dishevelled and twisted by the wind from the Zuyder Zee, all pale and white. A boat in the rushes, a ferry-boat with fishing tackle,



ARAB HORSEMAN CARRYING A LUNATIC.

Pencil sketch of the Picture by Eugène Fromentin.

a shed of worm-eaten reeds. Wind, sunshine, and winter surround these little cabins lost between the pastures and the water.

In autumn they are in a swamp; the first frost surrounds them with ice. There are birds, storks, lapwings, swallows and starlings around the cattle. Sea-gulls go and come with the waves and travel with the tides, from the sea to the end of the plains and from the plains to the sea. Afar, very far off, are the downs. Away in the northeast, above the last sandy or muddy planes of the Delta, is the sea, — the gray Zuyder Zee touching the sky. Amid the fog in the remotest distance is a narrow horizon of land which issues from the liquid horizon, is interrupted, and disappears. These are the innumerable hollows of this complicated coast of the Gulf of Lye. Turf, hay, the aftermath, a cart which gathers it up, and here and there a bridge thrown across a canal, more rarely still a road outside of the great highways.

Over all is the great sky with heaped-up clouds, covering with moving shadows this small and remote landscape, measuring its distances so well, and by the mass and heights of its cloud-heaps, rendering the largest terrestrial objects small.

We return. Amsterdam is before us lying flat upon the edge of the southern horizon with its few spires, innumerable windmills, red roofs, blue roofs, masts of ships and smoking chimneys.

We know that here Cuyp, Ruysdael, and Paul Potter wandered, paused, seated themselves, drew and painted; that here Rembrandt went to the little country house of his friend, the burgomaster, with prepared slates in his pocket, and fancifully, when the desire seized him, improvised an etching, directly from a willow, or three trees, or nothing at all, cutting into the copper.

Amsterdam.

A gray, sad, moist morning, all veiled with low clouds and fog. Amsterdam, which I have just traversed almost from one end to the other, has the sort of physiognomy which best suits it. It is soft and sombre. The canals are motionless and gleaming; the trees unswayed by wind. The boats lie at rest along the quays, with heavy frames, polished timbers, paddles to starboard and larboard, flat against their sides like folded fins.

The streets; morning stir. All the servants at the doors, washing, sponging, sweeping; sailors, shop-keepers.

Dampness makes everything shine. Bricks, wood-work, painted doors, balustrades of porches, brick sidewalks. Singular effect of so many windows relieved by their white frames, their gray sashes, their gleaming panes, against the dark purplish brick of the houses. Flowers on the window-sills. Few openings. Little curious mirrors. Say not here, 'She opens her window;' say, 'She raises it a little, and makes it slide from the top down.'

Now he is in the country of Spinoza and Rembrandt, but the name of Rembrandt covers everything. His work, the most disturbing work in the world, and more than all, the *Night Watch*, is the object of Fromentin's journey. The *Night Watch* inspires him, he acknowledges beforehand, with great attraction and grave doubts; for is it not the most celebrated of pictures, and the one for whose sake the most paper has been blackened?

It is a great matter, he says in his notes, to attack two of Rembrandt's masterpieces, and not to agree with the admiration of the world. The *Anatomical Lecture* is a work of great value, but not a perfect work. This is agreed, which sets me at my ease. But this one is quite another thing; and the question is to learn who is mistaken, — everybody or one's self. Universal error is scarcely probable. The error is then mine. Now other people's error is easy to discover and demonstrate; as to one's own, it is harder to recognize it and confess it.

And farther on: —

The destiny of works is singular, and glory is incomprehensible. Modern humanity, which loves the arts, has made in its heaven a kind of dazzling constellation, in which it has classed certain works which are the objects of universal predilection. It is well understood that Rembrandt is among them, and

as a great name is always personified in a great work, he has been represented in this cluster of stars by the *Night Watch*. Is the star well chosen? No. Would it be well to replace it by another? Also, no; for importance is everything, and the supreme merit of a work of less size would not suffice, it appears, to place it in this super-terrestrial rank.

The ground is burning, but Fromentin enters upon it with unflinching resolution not to be turned aside from his inquiry. This tends to nothing less than deposing the *Night Watch* from that super-terrestrial rank which has been guarded by the admiration of the masses. By this our author created for himself in Holland, and particularly in Amsterdam, implacable hostilities. I remember a conversation between some rather crude people, though they were clever men and men of taste, to which I listened a year after the appearance of the book, in the little hall without issue, almost without light, of the Trippenhuis, where are found opposite each other, "like the opposition of two truths throwing light upon each other," Rembrandt's *Night Watch* and Van der Helst's *Banquet of Arquebusiers*. Fromentin was sent unceremoniously to the devil, and no punishment was considered too severe for such a crime as his.

The argument of Fromentin, separated from all incidents and all its critical developments, and especially from all that technical underbrush through which the author advances so resolutely, may be summed up in a few words. I must say, however, that I find it rather tainted with subtlety, and its point of view displays excessive rigor towards a work which, in its defects as well as its merits, is out of the common course.

The *Night Watch*, he says, is a misconception, like Titian's *Assumption* or *The Rape of Europa* by Veronese. "A great effort and interesting evidences of it are the most positive things it contains." It astonishes and disconcerts; it is imposing, but, "an unexampled fact among the fine works of picturesque art," it lacks charm, and "that first insinuating attractiveness which is persuasive." It is maintained that the place is in perfect accord with the necessities of the work, but the contrary is true; the light is detestable; the painting lost in a dark wooden frame, and the lack of distance compels us to see it on a level, and so to speak, at sword's points. The great prestige of the *Night Watch* results from the fact that it is comprehensible. "The rendering is commonplace;" and his contemporaries, accustomed by Franz Hals and others to these pictures of display, would have judged it "poor in resource." The composition is disconnected, full of holes; the figures taken separately are not any more interesting, and what is more, they are full of eccentricities to say the least useless, and of grand defects; the details, even the fabrics in which Rembrandt excels, lack precision and cleverness. Some of the heads are very fine, it is true; they may be looked upon as Rembrandt in his moments of strength "means that his human effigies shall be regarded, attentively, closely, in their very eyes;" but these are accessory figures in the background. The little sorceress who occupies the luminous point in the canvas is neutral, formless, and defies all explanation.

Two things remain, upon which opinion in our day seems unanimous, — "the color, which is called unique; and the execution, which is considered sovereign."

Upon these two points Fromentin is no less positive. In the first place we must understand the word coloring; and he gives in passing a very delicate definition of the qualification of colorist, which is so freely used on all occasions. It is well to cite his own terms. "A colorist properly so called, is a painter who can preserve in the colors of his scale, whether rich or not, broken or not, complicated or simple, their principle, fitness, resonance and just relation, everywhere and always, in shadow, in the half-tint, and even in the brightest light. There are men — witness Velasquez," he adds, "who color marvellously with the saddest colors. . . . It suffices for this that the color should be rare, tender, or powerful, but resolutely composed by a man skilful in feeling distinctions, or in rendering them." Now Rembrandt does not proceed thus in the *Night Watch*. "With the exception of one or two frank colors, two reds and a dark violet, except one or two sparkles of blue, you see nothing in this colorless and violent canvas which recalls the palette and the ordinary methods of any known colorist." Is he even any longer in this work an exceptional workman? Not even that. "The touch is thick, embarrassed, almost unskilful and groping. Everywhere are reliefs, that is, sharp accents, without necessity or truth, or real fitness. In all the salient parts there is a convulsive handling and a turbulent execution that conflicts with the slight reality obtained, and the rather lifeless immovability of the result."

What then remains, in the eyes of the author of "The Old Masters," to the *Night Watch?* The magic of chiaroscuro, a great effort in a new direction, and, to say the whole, the first imposing

display of Rembrandt's *light,* — that light born of his genius, which is neither the light of day nor of night.

I have said that Fromentin's point of view is excessively severe; and I may be permitted to say that this *remainder,* which is an ideal atmosphere circulating among all these figures, enveloping them with space and life, and animating them, however little they may be indicated, with the most extraordinary relief, suffices to make of the *Night Watch* a work of the first importance, worthy of its immense renown. The whole power of Rembrandt seems to me to lie in the fact that one single merit, exercised to the very limit of intensity, suffices to veil in a cloud of gold all these accumulated defects.

No one will contradict Fromentin when he decides that the genius of Rembrandt has circumscribed his ideal, not in the poetry of color, but in that of light. Light is the grandeur of this incomparable master. From this arises a new word to express a new idea, the word *luminarist.*

"A luminarist, if I am not mistaken," says Fromentin, "would be a man who conceives light outside of recognized laws, would attach to it an extraordinary meaning, and make great sacrifices to it. The whole career of Rembrandt turns upon this absorbing idea, — to paint only with the aid of light, and draw only with light." And all Fromentin is contained in this characteristic formula: "All the very diverse judgments pronounced upon these works, fine or defective, doubtful or incontestable, may be brought back to this simple question: Was this or was it not an occasion for making light the exclusive condition? Did the subject require it, did it allow it, or



ARABS OF THE GREAT TENTS.

From a sketch by Eugène Fromentin.

exclude it? In the first case, the work is a result of the spirit of the work; infallibly it would be admirable. In the second, the result is uncertain, and almost infallibly the work is doubtful, and not successful." By the aid of this guiding rule it becomes easy to measure the scope of each of Rembrandt's works. The argument is certainly ingenious, and, if one does not generalize too much, of indisputable value.

But Fromentin goes farther. He sees in Rembrandt two men of adverse nature, who have often combated, or, at least, greatly embarrassed, each other. The *Syndics*, the "last masterpiece of this double great man," are but the final reconciliation of these two natures, which had "such trouble in manifesting themselves together without mutual injury."

At first, there is the painter whom Fromentin calls the exterior man, of "clear mind, vigorous hand, and infallible logic. His manner of seeing is the healthiest possible; his manner of painting edifying, by the simplicity of its means; his method itself attests that he wishes, above all things, to be comprehensible and veracious. His palette is wise, limpid, tinged with the true colors of daylight, and without a cloud. His drawing is forgotten, but it forgets nothing. It is excellent in expression of countenance. He expresses and characterizes in their individuality features, looks, attitudes, and gestures; that is to say, the usual habits and furtive accidents of life. His execution has the propriety, amplitude, the lofty bearing, the firm tissue, the force and conciseness, appropriate to the craftsmen who are passed masters in the art of fine language. His painting

is gray and black, without lustre, extremely fat and savory." The manifestations of this Rembrandt unalloyed are rare. The finest are perhaps the portraits from the Van Loon Gallery, now at Baron Gustave Rothschild's, and that of Six.

And then there is the spiritualist, the idealist, the innovator who seeks, the thinker who pursues his dream with the force of clairvoyance peculiar to illumined understandings, — a singular mixture of boldness, groping, sudden flashes, obscurities, supernatural beauties, and repulsive plainness. His touch is by turns admirable or "heavy, embarrassed, retouched, altered," like that of a man preoccupied and distracted by his visions. It is the Rembrandt of the *Night Watch*, of the *Danaë* at St. Petersburg, and the *Jewish Bride* at the Van der Hoop Museum, — a bad picture, which, according to Fromentin, is one of his grave mistakes.

No. 95. — Rembrandt.

Ugly; very near being bad; poorly set upon the canvas; meaningless in gesture; insignificant, senseless. The tone? Less fine than the little *Hoogh* (No. 52) which is found below. Is it stronger in tonality? No. It is less marked on the wall, and less noticeable, though five or six times larger. It is rough, uneven, labored, and painful. No color, or rather a glimpse of ugly colors. Bad work, showing all his faults.

From the intermittent agreement of these two natures, from the fortuitous union of this hand and this brain, were born, according to Fromentin, some immortal masterpieces, like the *Tobias*, the *Joiner's Family*, the *Good Samaritan*, the *Philosophers*, the *Disciples of Em-*

maus, and the *Portrait of a Woman* at the Louvre, and the *Syndics* at Amsterdam.

Fine minds and eminent critics have refused to follow Fromentin so far. I feel that this duality is rather a bold conception. In any case, it leads the pen of the author of "The Old Masters" to deductions of great interest, and to absolutely new discussions; it casts new and unexpected light upon certain peculiarities of Rembrandt's style. Finally, it has procured for us several pages of most admirable criticism upon the works that we have mentioned above, and which are, in Fromentin's eyes, decided confirmations of Rembrandt's genius.

I cannot resist the pleasure of quoting the two passages which treat of the *Good Samaritan* and the *Disciples of Emmaus*. It is the highest kind of art criticism. Fromentin has written nothing more masterly nor more characteristic: —

Do you remember the *Good Samaritan* that we have at the Louvre? Do you recall that man half dead, bent double, supported by the shoulders, carried by the legs, shattered, his whole body twisted, panting with the movement of the walkers, his legs bare, his feet pressed together, his knees touching, one arm awkwardly bent over his hollow chest, his brow enveloped in a bandage on which blood is seen? Do you remember that small, suffering face, with its half-closed eyes, its dim glance, its features like those of a dying man, one eyebrow lifted, that mouth which groans, and the two lips parted with an imperceptible contortion, wherein the wail expires? It is late, everything is in shadow, except two or three floating gleams which seem to change places upon the canvas, so capriciously are they placed, so mobile and light; nothing conflicts with the uniform tranquillity of the twilight. In the mystery of this dying day, you scarcely remark, on the left of the picture, the horse so admirable in style, and the child of sickly appearance who stands on tiptoe

looking over the horse's shoulders, and with slight compassion follows with his eyes to the inn the wounded man who has been picked up on the road, and is being carefully carried, groaning and heavy, in the hands of his bearers.

The canvas is smoky, all impregnated with sombre gold, very rich below, and particularly grave. The material is muddy, and yet transparent; the execution is heavy, and yet subtle, hesitating, and determined, labored and free, very unequal, uncertain, vague in certain places, and of astonishing precision in others. I do not know what it is in it that invites to self-communings, and would convey to us, if the mind could be diverted in presence of so imperious a work, that the author himself was singularly attentive and thoughtful when he painted it. Pause, look at it from afar, from near by, examine it long. There is no apparent outline, not one conventional accent, but an extreme timidity, which is not ignorance, and which may be said to come from a fear of being commonplace, or from the price the thinker attaches to the immediate and direct expression of life; a construction of objects which seems to exist of itself, almost without the aid of known formulas, and renders, by imperceptible methods, the uncertainties and precisions of nature. The bare legs, and feet of irreproachable construction, are also in a good style. In their small dimensions they cannot be forgotten, any more than the feet and limbs of the Christ can be forgotten in the *Entombment* of Titian. In this pale, thin, moaning visage there is nothing which is not an expression, something coming from within out, weakness, suffering, and the sorrowful joy of seeing succor come when one is about to die. There is not a contortion, not a feature which exceeds moderation, not a touch in this manner of rendering the inexpressible, which is not pathetic and restrained, and all is dictated by a profound emotion, and translated by methods altogether extraordinary.

Look around this picture without any grand exterior, and which is impressive from afar to those who know how to see, solely from the power of its general scale of color; examine the great gallery, even return to the Salon Carré, consult the strongest and most skilful painters, from the Italians to the subtle Hollanders, from Giorgione's *Concert* to Metzu's *Visit*, from Holbein's *Erasmus* to Terburg and Ostade; examine the painters of sentiment, of physi-

ognomy, of attitudes, the men of scrupulous observation, or the men of enthusiasm; discover what they proposed to themselves, study their researches, measure their domain, weigh well their language, and ask yourself if you perceive anywhere such intimacy in the expression of a face, emotion of such naturalness, any such ingenuousness in the way of seeing, anything, in a word, so delicate to conceive, so delicate to say, which is said in terms either more original, more exquisite, or more perfect. . . . .

What I tell you about the *Samaritan* I shall say about the *Tobias*, and, with still better reason, of the *Disciples of Emmaus*, a marvel too hidden in a corner of the Louvre, which may be counted among the masterpieces of the master. This little picture alone, of poor appearance, of no dramatic arrangement, of dull color, of careful, and almost awkward, execution, would suffice to establish forever the grandeur of a man. Without speaking of the disciple who comprehends and folds his hands, of the one who is astonished, and, placing his napkin on the table, looks straight at the head of Christ, and says clearly what in ordinary language might be translated by the exclamation of a stupefied man, — not to speak of the young servant with black eyes who is bringing a dish, and sees but one thing, a man who was about to eat but does not eat, and crosses himself with compunction, — if only the *Christ* were preserved from this unique work it would be enough. Who is the painter who has not made a *Christ*, — at Rome, Florence, Sienna, Milan, Venice, Basle, Bruges, and Antwerp? From Leonardo, Raphael, and Titian, to Van Eyck, Holbein, Rubens, and Van Dyck, how has he not been deified, humanized, transfigured, shown in his history, his passion, and his death? How have been related the acts of his terrestrial life, how conceived the glories of his apotheosis? Has he ever been imagined thus, — pale, thin, sitting facing the observer, breaking bread as on the night of the Last Supper, in his pilgrim's robe, with his lips black with the traces of his torture, his great brown eyes soft, widely open, and raised to heaven, with his cold nimbus, like a sort of phosphorescence, around him, which envelops him with a vague glory, and the ineffable look of a living, breathing man, who yet has surely passed through death? The attitude of this divine shade, this gesture impossible to describe, certainly impossible to

copy, the intense ardor of this face whose type is expressed without features, and the expression of which depends on the movement of the lips and the glance, — these things, inspired no one knows where, and produced no one knows how, are all priceless. No art recalls them; no one before Rembrandt, nor any one after him, has uttered them.

In the last chapter, Fromentin, who cannot make up his mind to leave Rembrandt, returns to the man and his work taken as a whole.

In everything, as is seen, he was a man apart, a dreamer, perhaps a silent man, although his face says the contrary, possibly of angular, and rather rough disposition, stiff, cutting, not pleasant to contradict, still less to convince, at bottom wavering, but rigid in form, and undoubtedly eccentric. If at first he was celebrated and cherished and boasted of, in spite of the jealous and short-sighted pedants and fools, they revenged themselves bravely when he was no longer there.

In two words, as a man, a studious man, a man of taste, as a thinker, as an artist, no one in his own time seems to have exactly grasped his scope, or suspected his true greatness, which is, in all and before all, to have tried to substitute for physical beauty *moral expression.*

Intelligent study of his genius is of recent date. Fromentin has thrown great light upon it, although the freedom of his views has set him from the beginning in opposition to the fanatical admirers of this master; for no artist, ancient or modern, except, in another way, Raphael, has awakened such adoration in our time. Nothing can be juster than when he writes, in conclusion, that Rembrandt's domain is that of ideas, and his language that of ideas; that the



STUDY OF MOUNTED ARAB.

Fac-simile of a drawing by Eugène Fromentin.

mechanism of the painter is of so little consequence that he can be discovered, studied, and judged wholly by his etchings; and he would be almost as great had he been only an engraver; while a plate like the *Hundred Florin Piece* does him as much honor, and makes him better understood than the most celebrated of his paintings.

After Rembrandt, Fromentin leaves Holland. But how many more things he might have said for our profit! His memorandum-books are crammed with notes upon the museums of the Hague and Amsterdam, upon the Six and Van Loon galleries, and upon the Van der Hoop collection.

Let us secure, in passing, a charming note concerning the admirable *Metzu* of Van der Hoop: —

No. 68. — *Metzu.*

Extremely fine and rare, and fit for a companion to that in the Louvre; perhaps more delightful. The man who holds the partridge is a wonder, — his hands, head, his doublet faced with blue, his shirt-sleeve, the feathers in his hat, and the dog. The drawing is simple. Construction, gesture, expression, look, tone, and execution are all perfectly finished.

The tone of the whole is most wonderful; the radiance equal to that of the strongest luminarists. Not one trick, not one falsity, not one useless violence, — wisdom, knowledge, force, and taste. The touch is sublime. This and the *Terburg* in the Six Gallery are the most perfect things I have seen in this style.

I may be pardoned for pausing with Fromentin before Rembrandt. I must now hurry on.

The volume of "The Old Masters" ends with Ghent and Bruges, — that is, with Van Eyck and Memling. Fromentin goes back to

the primitive painters, with whom he should logically have begun, according to his own expression, if he had thought of writing an analytical catalogue of the schools of the Netherlands.

Memling touches him most nearly. The severe and rigorous calm of the Van Eycks terrifies his spirit by its very force. Before a subject so vast, so multifarious, so laden with interrogations, as the Flemish blossoming in the fifteenth century, he hesitates, pauses, raises a corner of the veil, and allows to gleam before our eyes, like dazzling jewels, some of these masterpieces, which will be for the traveller an eternal surprise and an infinite field of observation; then he draws bridle, and returns to France. Before the colossal triptych of the *Mystic Lamb* of the brothers Van Eyck at St. Bavon, he exclaims with regret that he can give no sufficient idea of it. "The mind can pause here perpetually, dream here forever, without penetrating the depths of what it expresses or what it evokes. The eye, in the same way, can delight itself therein, without exhausting the extraordinary wealth of the pleasure it causes or the instruction it conveys to us."

Fromentin does not delay for works of secondary importance. He takes only the mountain-peaks: the *Mystic Lamb* of Ghent, the *Virgin of Pala*, of the Bruges Academy, the *Shrine of St. Ursula*, and the *Marriage of St. Catherine*, at the Hospital of St. John. These are in fact the most conclusive works of these great masters: their genius can in them be wholly measured.

I recommend the reading of these last serenely tranquil pages, and content myself with collecting Fromentin's notes, taken on the

spot, at the Academy of Bruges and at the Hospital. They are characteristic. The impression they leave is almost more powerful, the accent more firm than in the final publication.

Academy — Van Eyck.

The Virgin, St. Donatus, St. George, and a Donor. Fine picture. If it were but revarnished, it would be one of the finest I know. The Virgin, with a great red mantle, with broken folds, like Albert Dürer, with a little blue on the bodice. A child suffering with the rickets, and extraordinarily real in gesture and countenance, gazes at the Donor, and stretches out his arms to him. The child's gesture is perfect, not in the least idealized.

On the right St. Donatus, mitre of gold and jewels, great blue cape, with golden flowers, and a golden border; on the left, St. George, the donor, on his knees (an abbé), old, bald, with floating, blond hair grizzled around his temples, heavy frame, face horribly wrinkled, seamed and cracked, studied with a magnifying glass, and very well painted, divinely drawn, the work on the cheeks and temples wonderful in its truth, delicacy, and reality. In his clasped hands he holds a little parchment book, his gloves, and a pair of horn spectacles; on the left arm hangs a band of fur. Throne, carpet, marble floor, complicated architecture, little bit of stained glass, with lozenge-shaped panes. The Abbé is in a white surplice, — grave, deep, rich harmony, extremely fine and strong; values very close and learned. Everywhere you feel as if there was a golden foundation. Back of the canopy black, with red figures. The carpet is Oriental, — old Persian.

Fine principles in every color; full, fat, copious. It is dry only at the edge.

Bruges, Saturday, July 24.

Van Eyck and Memling, particularly Memling.

All Bruges is in these two men. If the Hospital of St. John should disappear with the four or five painted wooden panels which it has preserved

for three centuries and a half, there would be an irreparable void in the history of art, and a delicious chapter in human history would be lacking.

How were these three men formed, — the two Van Eycks and Memling? Who set them on the road? Who counselled them thus to look at nature, and so well showed them how to render her? Who told them to see with this strong simplicity, this sensitive attention, this energetic patience, and this ever equal feeling, in a labor so studied and slow? Who formed them so soon, so quickly, and so perfectly?

For it is another art than that of the Italian Renaissance; but in the order of sentiments that it expresses, and the subjects it relates, it is very finished. The language of art has since become richer, it is more supple, it has broadened; but it has never, when it was necessary, found either this expressive conciseness, nor this propriety of method, nor this brilliancy. Is Van Eyck stronger than Memling? Memling, who follows by forty or fifty years, and who certainly should have profited by such an example, is he in advance of his predecessors? Who can affirm it? Materially, they were contemporaries. Their methods are the same, their archaisms of the same period, their compositions almost identical.

Whoever sees, half an hour apart, or, so to speak, side by side, the *Virgin of the Donor*, by Van Eyck (Academy of Bruges), and the *Marriage of St. Catherine*, at the Hospital of St. John, can easily find the difference between the genius of the two men. As to the date of their work, it might be believed contemporary.

The aspect of it is not very different. Perhaps the general tone is more sustained by Van Eyck; his work is stronger as a whole, and more learned in values. The whites are more savory, the reds richer in the first tints, and the vivid blue, which is his own, stronger in coloring principle and composition. The handiwork is finer in the ornamentation, the golds more numerous, better rendered, with a more delicate hand, and the sensation received from nature is evidently stronger in Van Eyck. Perhaps he cares more for exterior things, and, without treating them more carefully, translates them by a more ardent feeling for their richness, their brilliancy, and their interest in the picture.

With him luxury is extreme, — jewelry, precious stones, pearls, emeralds, rubies; everywhere are felt the material, the gems, the embroideries, the precious metals. When the Van Eyck is fine, — and that at Bruges is admirable in this respect, — it might be thought one of those stuffs of color and divers tissues whose woof is of gold. Gold is felt everywhere, even when it is not seen. When it appears, it is the extreme luxury and the sparkling embroidery of the picture; when it is disguised, it is still underneath to enrich the tone and give it something more opulent and precious. Van Eyck prefers rare stuffs; he renders them better, and gives a more beautiful idea of them. An Oriental carpet placed by Van Eyck under the feet of his Madonnas better recalls a fine carpet; when he paints marble, he is nearer marble; and when between two dark columns he makes the little lozenge-shaped panes of his chapels, it is a perfect deception.

In the other, — the grand and tender Memling, — are the same power of tone, and the same brilliancy, with less ardor and less truth. I do not know whether, even in that masterpiece, *St. Catherine*, which is marvellous in every respect, he is as sustained in color as his great rival. In any case, it is not the same kind of brilliancy; nor has he the same sombre manner, always strong and even, of filling a canvas with rich color.

On the other hand, he has in parts a suppleness that Van Eyck has not. He has exquisite half-tints, and differences of light and depth between the principal figures and the secondary ones. The figure of *St. John*, and that of the *Donor*, by the quality of their atmosphere, and the veil which softens them, indicate a step in advance of the *Madonna* of the Academy, and a decided step beyond the admirable triptych of Ghent. Fine heads, velvety, modelled as much as is possible, closely rendered, and all in chiaroscuro. The very color of their garments — one of dark maroon, the other an ample red — reveals a new art in composing a tone in shadow. These show more delicate sensations, and combinations of the palette unknown until then.

The handiwork is not very different. Everywhere that he is sustained and animated by sentiment, and compelled by it to vivid affirmation, Memling is as firm as Van Eyck. When he attaches less importance to objects, the hand

of the jeweller and enameller is less felt, not that there is in him anywhere either weakness or negligence. The workman is always excellent, only he interests himself a little more or a little less, and studies living nature more than still life. The heads and hands are the points he has studied, and in them he is unique.

In fact, as soon as they are compared from the point of view of feeling, there is, so to speak, nothing more in common between them.

Then the two styles divide, and are indicated, each in the exact sense of nature. A world separates them. One sees with the eye, the other with the mind; one copies and imitates, the other transfigures; one closely reproduces the human type he had before his eyes, the other dreams while he looks at nature, imagines while translating her, and creates a masculine and particularly a feminine type, neither of which can ever be forgotten. They are men and women, simply seen as he loves them, and according to the exquisite preferences of a soul wholly turned towards grace, nobleness, and beauty.

What can be more real, and what more ideal? There is no uncertainty about the epoch, the race, or the social class from which he borrows these delicate, blonde, fine, and charming women. His saints are the great ladies or the princesses of his time. They have their grace, their elegance, their delicate ligaments, their indolent white hands, their pure and pleasing faces, and that wholly individual way of wearing their sumptuous robes, and hiding their fair silky hair under the half-veil of gauze, and beneath the slender diadem of gold and pearls. They hold a book of devotion, and read it like attentive, serious women, surprised gravely reading in an oratory. Straight and slender are they in the closely fitting bodices of their robes. A pretty gesture, a pretty attitude, a pretty, smooth, white neck, rather long; and what delicious faces! with the eyes lowered under long lashes, a little thicker at the angle of the eye, and thinner towards the temples.

And if from the notes we return to the book, we can rest upon this delicious conclusion, which is exhaled like a sigh: "Imagine, amid the horrors of that age, a sanctuary, a sort of angelic retreat,

ideally silent and enclosed, where passions are silent, where troubles cease, where men pray and worship, where everything is transfigured, even physical plainness and moral ugliness, where new sentiments are born, where, like lilies, grow ingenuousness, gentleness, and super-



natural courtesy, and you will have an idea of the unique soul of Memling, and the miracle he effected in his pictures."

The development that I have given to my analysis of "The Old Masters" sufficiently marks my esteem for this work of such individual value. I am therefore at liberty to temper my eulogium

by a slight criticism. Many of these pages count incontestably among Fromentin's best, and consequently among the most remarkable of contemporary literature; but, as a whole, the style of "The Old Masters" is of a less even flow than that of the "Sahel," and particularly of the "Sahara." It has an attraction which savors more of precision, a more studied elegance, and more clean-cut phrases. If any private influence is revealed in it, it is that of Sainte-Beuve, the great master of critical style. Fromentin's manner in the two volumes on Algeria was so particularly pure, that one is led to regret that the novelty of a subject full of snares and complications made him more exacting than ever, and that the logic of his mind led him to bring into entire unison his methods of expression and the ideas to be expressed. But he who chooses may hold this semblance of an imperfection as one more merit.

CHAPTER XI.



A FEW words remain for me to say concerning two unpublished fragments, the "Isle of Ré" and the "Egyptian Journey."

The proximity of the Isle of Ré to La Rochelle and St. Maurice had given Fromentin the idea of writing a sort of picturesque geographical and statistical study concerning this tiny country, so very little known, although but a few minutes distant from the coast of La Vendée, and yet very worthy of being studied, on account of its original character and the habits of its population.

Fromentin merely made a sketch of this work which he intended to address in the form of a letter to the editor of the "Revue des Deux Mondes," but he only wrote the first pages. The manuscript bears the date of 1862. I do not know the reason that turned Fromentin aside from

a labor that his repeated visits to St. Maurice rendered doubly interesting and easy.

The "Journey into Egypt" is much more important. It consists only of notes taken from day to day, and, so to speak, hour by hour, — a painter's notes, taken during the tour he made in October,



November, and December, 1879, as a guest at the festivities at the inauguration of the Suez Canal.

How far already is that time from us! France seemed then to live only upon spectacles and pleasures. The intellectual élite of Paris went one day, at the expense of the Viceroy, to be present at this great scientific performance in which our country played the



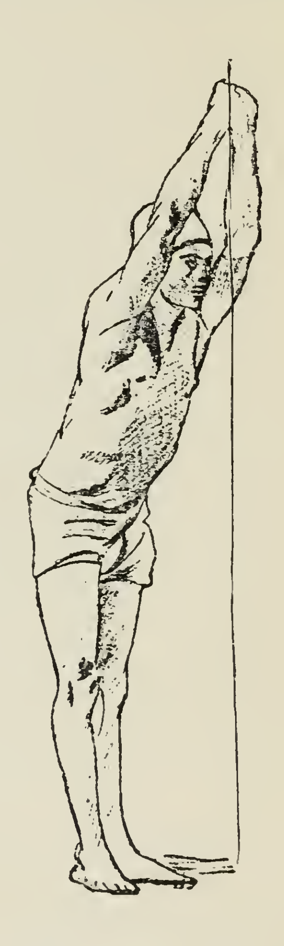
STUDY FOR THE PICTURE OF THE FANTASIA.

leading part. The invitations were scattered in profusion, not only through France, but also, although in less number, through England, Italy, Germany, Austria, even through America, and as far as Australia. It was a caravan, a cohort, an invasion, the astonishment of which old Egypt will long remember. Fromentin was very justly one of the chosen. He left Marseilles October 9, and returned only on December 6. His note-book never left him during the whole duration of a journey which he had accepted as a rest, and as a precious opportunity for instruction, but which was in truth, as is perceptible at each page, only a fatiguing and flurried knocking about. He recorded in it his daily impressions with the artistic care that he put into the least things. Fromentin's notes have always a character of precision and sincerity, which gives them a value of their own. I publish elsewhere the fragment of the "Ile de Ré," which has been kindly furnished me by Madame Fromentin. I will give here only two or three fragments of the Egyptian Notes to make the interest of the work appreciated.

Has the painter of Algeria drawn anything finer than this sunset on the Nile, near Minieh?

Unique sunset and evening, never to be forgotten. The place seemed chosen for such a spectacle. The Nile was immense and calm, which it rarely is; a true mirror three or four thousand metres in extent, the Lybian coast scarcely visible above the river, and a little village plumed with date-palms behind which the sun was setting, a point of fierce red light, with violet base on the right and left. Palm-trees blue, dark ultramarine, the horizon line imperceptible, dusty ultramarine, and white bituminous waters of dirty silver. Reflections very distinct, bitumen and blue, outline precise.

The illumination which followed the sunset was extraordinary, and for a quarter of an hour it filled almost half of the celestial horizon from north to south. As high as Venus nothing but fire in a sky of unrivalled limpidity. The Nile reproduced exactly, almost as clearly, sometimes more clearly, this tremendous



radiance. The inexhaustible light leaped up and up, while on the other hand the gray and smoky night advanced to dispute the sky with it. We had before our eyes all mythology, all the Asiatic worships, all the terrors inspired by night; the love of the sun, the king of the world; the pain of seeing his death to see him born again on the morrow in Horus; the eternal struggle, every day renewed, of Osiris and Typhon. Finally night triumphed, but the struggle

had been long. The gold, as it was extinguished, changed into fire, then into red, then into dark purple. The flaming circle contracted. Three quarters of an hour after, it was but a narrow disk invaded on all sides by the shadows, and seemed like a far off memory of day. Night, real night, finally reached the West itself. Raising my eyes, I perceived that Venus was no longer alone. All the constellations were aflame.

There were long, slender, dark lines, isles not wholly submerged, which were drawn in deep black upon the field of burning waters; afar off, one or two boats without sails — for the air was still — beat the Nile with their heavy oars. A few pelicans skimmed the wave with slow flight; one light alone shone on the level of the water in this immense horizon vast as an arm of the sea. The moon rose at half-past seven, already past the full, red and then orange colored, — finally it became a globe of gold.

What finer than this view of Girgeh?

Morning very cool, with light, sharp wind from the north; the Nile rippled by the breeze. Girgeh occupies a turn in the river. It faces the southeast, and clings, as it were, to the Arabian chain of hills, which plunges its high stone cliffs into the Nile, which is quite narrow at this point. There is a promenade around the city, by the exterior wall, almost deserted. Dogs wandering in the great vacant spaces, birds in crowds, hawks, rooks, white herons, winging their way towards the ponds. Huge white dovecotes with their perches loaded with pigeons of slaty lilac, with throats azure green. Clouds of them leave the perches, make one or two wild flights in the blue sky, and scatter in groups around the neighboring palm-trees. They are seen from afar like a swarm of flies. The hawks circle with low cries. The roads are free from dust; the ground, still moist with the dews of night, is browner. The water-wagtails move over it with their fine silver bodices, their skipping walk, and the little cry that I have so often listened to elsewhere.

Migratory birds have this charming quality; they transport with them the living memories of many different countries. I find them here where I did not think to find them; they bring with them our West, our autumns, our

ploughed fields, the meadows under the white frost, all the October mornings; while over there are Girgeh, Thebes, Assouan, the whole course of the Nile. An expatriated fellah would say to them, "Welcome." A thousand leagues from my country, I say to them, "Good day, ye are welcome."

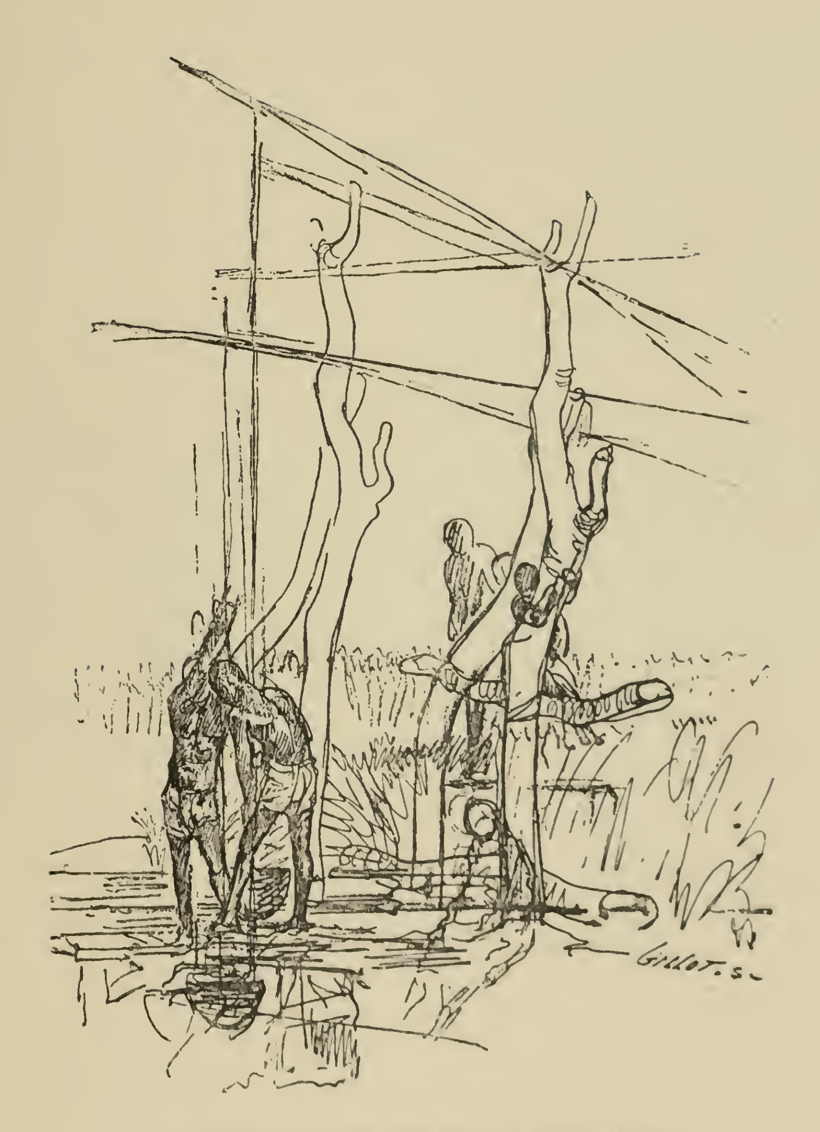
What more luminous or full of color than this sketch of the Tombs of the Mamelukes?

Old Cairo borders on the desert. Two steps and you leave the shadow of its narrow streets to issue forth into the sun and the dust of rubbish.

No transition; a few ruined huts, a few brick kilns, and then the desolate hills without grass, without other pebbles than the well or ill pulverized ruins succeeding one another, footpaths beaten by the steps of animals or travellers, incessantly trodden, also covered and levelled by the moving dust. You wind among these dreary little hills, and before you, far above, is the steep chain of Mokattam, which continues towards the south, and you suspect quite a large valley between this last distant rampart and the torrid zone you are climbing. This is the valley of the Mamelukes.

It is reached by a wider road, hard to tread, a light layer of sand or of sandy loam over stone. The sonorous bed is even with the soil. The valley is very beautiful in aspect. It is a different thing from the valley of the Caliphs, which it succeeds. There are no salient monuments except one isolated mosque at the extremity of the cemetery, marking its entrance on the side of the desert; but the Mokattam is superb. The extent of the horizon is immense; and the last, most remote dusty line, drawn as if with a rule at the base of the sky, and delicately bathed in opaline tints, gives the first charming idea of that grave, solemn, monotonous thing, sometimes terrible, but never wearisome, which is called the Desert. Thus I saw it appear from afar, between hills of tawny sand, or of very light earth, flat, infinite, having no color but the ideal color of distance, solitude and light.

The Tombs of the Mamelukes are an immense cemetery, or rather a great funereal city with winding narrow streets, complicated and of indefinite number,



SACHKI ON THE BANKS OF THE NILE.

and low houses without windows, and with only one door of rough timber, which are simply family tombs. Some of them are under domes; a few, much more monumental, have the form and importance of a chapel. All the spaces not built upon are occupied by tombs without enclosures. Afar off it might be deemed a city irregularly built among tombs. When one approaches, one



comprehends that everything there belongs to the dead; that this great valley is for all, great or small, the field of rest; and that, as in our West, there are only differences of rank and fortune between those who inhabit it. No one inhabits this singular city. Only a few masons building the wall of a new enclosure, or the family of some of the guardians, a child, or perchance a woman crouching in the middle of the empty roads, where only burials pass, are seen. An extraordinary silence fills this valley from one end to the other, where even

the sounds of Cairo do not reach; and the light which streams through these shapeless streets, and strikes upon the walls, many of which are rough-cast, upon the white cupolas, upon the tombs always freshly whitewashed, — this equal unbroken light, without any obstacle to its diffusion, forms perhaps the most softly brilliant portion of the panorama of Cairo. Moreover, the picture viewed as a whole is marvellous.

Fromentin certainly meant to make use of this "Egyptian Journey." He tells this himself in one of his notes: —

I wish to give of the things I see, a simple, clear, and true idea, to move others with the memory of what has moved me, to leave the reader indifferent to what has not interested me, to aggrandize nothing wilfully, and holding myself always within bounds, still to be able to recall things to those who know them, to render them palpable to the sense, and, as it were, to make them live again in the mind and eyes of those who know them not. This series of rapid sketches, of unfinished paintings, made flying, will not be a book; they cannot have the unity of one. The human element will be fatally absent from it. I shall have heard all that was said and screamed in the tumult of Egyptian towns, without understanding either the idea or the sense of it.

Two things which he had not foreseen caused him to abandon this project, by extinguishing little by little the enthusiastic conviction of the first days, — the tiresomeness of this life in common, and a violent attack of fever which seized him in upper Egypt and pulled him down till his return to Cairo. During the whole duration of the fever his notes are too brief, and consequently too insufficient, to serve as a basis for any further work. The "Journey in Egypt" remained, therefore, in the state of a sketch. The painter alone utilized the memories that the writer had secured. Such as

they are, however, Fromentin's notes in their conciseness still give us the most truthful painting that we have of certain aspects of the valley of the Nile.

I have now reached the end of this study.

By soul, emotion, and sentiment, Fromentin separates himself sharply from the purely picturesque school. His merits, tenderness and sensitiveness, range him by the side of Renan and George Sand. His virtues as a writer make him a classic, a master of the true French tradition, preserving moderation in expression, seeking the elegance of a studied but not mannered form, full of sobriety of epithet and delicate shades of meaning, while brightening by variety of juxtaposition a closely woven woof, a drawing full of relief, and subtle or deep thoughts always rich and numerous. Fromentin is a purist; he adores the masters of the seventeenth century and the old masters; like them he uses simple expressions which imprint like a burst of light an individual accent upon men and things. Pen in hand, he is not only an unrivalled painter: he is an ingenious thinker, alert and nervous, and an incomparable observer.

Fromentin ranks with George Sand, Théophile Gautier, Mérimée, and Renan, among the purest prose writers of the generation which is passing away.

THE ISLE OF RÉ

AN UNPUBLISHED FRAGMENT

BY FROMENTIN

THE ISLE OF RÉ.

FRAGMENT.

To the Editor of the "Revue des Deux Mondes:"

On landing here the other day for the first time, the idea seized me, Monsieur, to converse with you concerning this small country, slightly known, though lying at our doors, and curiously little observed; whose history has been promised us, but never written, and whose people, characterized as original — no one knows just why, perhaps because they have qualities that are tolerably rare — justify in its best acceptation the name given to them, and deserve, for their merits and their vices, to be studied as a people who are truly very singular.

The Isle of Ré shares the fate of all the very small countries that are separated from the continent by a large moat. Their existence is forgotten, and they themselves become used to living their own life in a sort of independent egotism, which confirms their geographical isolation, and makes them doubly forgotten. Solitary, often inaccessible, they might be called almost useless. The continent could, if needful, do without them; and it seems as if the neighboring territory of which the island forms a part would not lose anything very important if some catastrophe suppressed them

from the map of France. They have figured in history as accessories, and the rôle they thus played, though sometimes brilliant, has not always been very fortunate. The continual current of affairs which attaches them to the main land, of which they are tributaries, for the most part mingles them with nothing, — neither with the progress and movement of ideas, nor even with general interests. They have local interests which concentrate them, so to speak, upon themselves; and necessities of existence which imprison them in old habits. There reigns there, morally as well as physically, a sort of equable temperature, an oceanic average, which is almost never in harmony with the measure observed a few leagues from it upon the continent. Hence results a stationary condition, and anachronisms whose immovability seems singular. For instance, there might be cited a military islet, strongly armed by the first empire, neglected since peace was declared, where could still be found a few years ago, amid a few survivors, the ideas, usages, the warlike manner of thinking and speaking, and even the incredible fashions of 1813. The fusion of races operates as slowly as that of manners, when it operates at all. Often the mixing amounts to nothing, and the pure native blood is preserved, in sight of our coast, in spite of the universal amalgam of the French blood. Money circulates between the island and the continent, but without bringing about any other relations than those of business, and without forming any other tie than the rare friendships born of interest. People see each other from afar across the narrow channel which of one country makes two: they examine each other at a distance; they become used to look-

ing upon each other as strangers. On the main land they say "the island people," and on the island they say "the people of the main land." Very little is wanting on both sides to make them greet each other with a certain suspicion. There are family prejudices and village jealousies, which exist even now, and recall slightly the ancient and shadowy autonomy of the provinces; while all the modern urbanity which exists between good neighbors cannot prevail against the multifarious causes of disunion which separate them, and cannot prevent an island from being an island.

It is thus with the solitary and shut-in country of which I am speaking. Administratively it belongs to La Rochelle, but geographically it is insular, — that is, perfectly individual and original, as is maintained with truth. The opinion we have of this intelligent, active, laborious populace, prodigiously sober, and tenacious to excess, contains all its characteristics, and has nothing which is not well founded, provided it is explained.

The Isle of Ré is two and a half leagues from the port of La Rochelle, and only about forty-five hundred yards from the nearest point on the coast. The greatest distance is traversed every day by a steamboat which carries travellers and freight, and the shortest by a yawl, or open boat, which carries only despatches and travellers who are in a great hurry. This passage of one league, which is not always the quickest and surest, is ordinarily made in half an hour, when the sea is smooth and the wind favorable. At the original point of junction (if it is true that the island once formed a part of the continent), they still signal from one side to the other. And if

one goes back a short distance, so that the intervening channel disappears between the elevated parts of the two lands, it would be possible without much effort to still believe in the former union of the two countries. The island is always in sight, like a distant appendage to our parish, and it figures as a last slender gray pencil stroke in the vast scene of our horizon. It is situated in the western part of that zone whence the worst winds come to us, — the coldest in summer, the stormiest in winter. Tempests traverse its whole length before they reach us, and during the autumn hurricanes it is seen under a melancholy aspect, overwhelmed with clouds and drowned in another ocean of rain. The gayety of the rising sun illumines its rosy sands and makes them gleam above our country side, which is slightly embellished by this distant mirage. In the evening it strikes the island from the other side, and draws still more vigorously the firm outline of a low coast, on which can be distinguished trees, an indication of villages, and the pointed spire of a church. There are some days in the year, towards the equinox, when this fine needle, which by chance marks one of the periodical stations of the sun, is placed precisely upon its scarlet disk, and divides it into two equal parts exactly like a dial of flame.

Seen at this distance, and relegated into the quite vague perspective in which I show it to you, the island would appear too solitary, if I did not at once add that a considerable movement of coming and going brings us into relationship with it. The number of passengers who cross one way and the other in the course of a year is estimated at twenty thousand; and about ten

thousand come from the continent. The other ten thousand are the people of the island, who for one thing or another, but principally for money reasons, are obliged to go to the chief town. The total population of the island being of nineteen or twenty thousand souls, it must be admitted that about the half of this population, otherwise sedentary, has every year a reason for visiting us at least once; and if the individuals were renewed proportionally to the number of passages, not one inhabitant of the island could be reckoned who was not in the habit of frequently living among us, and the Isle of Ré would have been for a long time a suburb of La Rochelle. But things are quite otherwise. It is, on the contrary, a very small fraction of the two countries which travels from one to the other, and this fraction is always the same; the interests which move them, and make them constantly meet at the exchange or in the market-places, are very few in number, and also always similar. They are not renewed any more than the travellers, and grow fewer instead of multiplying. There are consequently many *Rétans*, indeed the great majority of them, who know the continent only under the form of a great unknown land on the horizon. And as to their country, to show it to you two leagues off from our coast, in the midst of the sea, is to exhibit it as it is seen from La Rochelle; and many of us have never learned any more about it.

It is known that it is covered with vineyards and salt works; that land is dear there, and that houses, on the contrary, go for nothing. People talk of the sea which washes the southern part of the island,—and is called with dismay the savage sea, — as a perpetual menace

and at the same time an immense resource: the wines and brandies, of which three quarters and a half are despatched for the commerce of the interior, are very diversely estimated; they are set quite low while they still bear the mark of the island, but once *naturalized*, or rather *denaturalized*, they are esteemed perhaps a little too high. If you consult the hunters of the main land, whose grand preserve the island has been for some years, they will tell you that the country is flat, sandy, easy to travel, admirably cultivated; that its inhabitants are polite; their habits active; inns rare; the oysters good; game, abundant; water, mediocre; fish, perfect.

Historically, everybody agrees concerning the short and sorrowful destiny of this wretched little country, courageously taking part either in our wars with England, or in our religious discords; taken and retaken, fought for, pillaged, razed to the ground, sacked, raised by Louis XIV. into a military establishment of the first order, a commercial place at one time, and on the point of growing rich, now dispossessed of its commerce, and modestly agricultural. Of its inhabitants we know what we see every day, and it must be said that is neither the most exact nor the most noble side of their physiognomy. They come to us in Sunday array, idle, almost invariably ridiculous, with superannuated clothes, umbrellas at all seasons, and ways that our peasants no longer have. They have black eyes, a tawnier and more ruddy complexion, a thick speech which makes them recognizable; they wear headgear that makes people smile; they go barefooted with their shoes in their hand, — an intrepid custom which, in their home, accords with their amphibious habits,

but is out of keeping with a dusty road. They are very peasant-like, moreover, but in their own way, and to be recognized among a thousand. Transport them into our communities, acclimate them upon our farms, plant them in our cities, you will never efface that unknown quality that makes an islander live and die faithful to his blood. They will be neither cleaner nor dirtier than people of the same class among us. They will have finer qualities, or defects less possible to correct,— an excess, a point, an accent, a turn of mind, often a virtue, rarely a vice; in fine, something salient, as in the animal kingdom, will distinguish the man of pure blood from the one of mixed race.

A few days ago all my notions concerning the Isle of Ré, were limited to what I have just said.

I came here by chance. It was fine weather; the sea, which is often an objection in such a trip, and which is judged faithless, I must tell you, by many of the dwellers on its coast, the sea, to which in any case is preferable what they call here the *cow's floor*, was charming. I traversed the island in a straight line, the sea was on the right and left; at times it could have been touched with the two hands. At the place where the ground fails under foot I saw before me the open sea,— this time it was the sea of America. I turned; the same solemn girdle was everywhere. An astonishing activity reigned on land, and a hundred persons were digging at once in a hundred bits of land or vineyards. In many places the earth was so light, and so poorly nourished, that it was sand that flew under the spade. I felt myself in a prison infinitely laborious

and active. I understood at the same time that I had reached the end of the world; and I know not why this idea, which never came to me at the extremity of the continent, struck me so strongly on the edge of this island. I said to myself that the end of the world is always very far off for him who comes from the other end of it; that distance, that curiosity, is also relative; and that I should myself be an object of astonishment to an observer who should disembark from the antipodes. The thought of beholding closely things that habit very often prevents our seeing plainly was inspired in me precisely by this change in the point of sight obtained with so very little effort. I therefore supposed myself a foreigner; I imagined that you would like to be in such a case my correspondent, and I asked myself whether there would not be something interesting to tell you about this country, if I had really discovered it. I seemed to hear you reply that there is an interest everywhere if one only knows how to extract it. This, Monsieur, did not too much discourage me, although the task, in reality, is difficult for me. Finally I decided to stop here, and I began at once the investigations that I shall address to you in a few pages.

I will preserve in them, if you will permit, the form of notes written daily, without other method than the capricious course of a chance walk. It will be more sincere and more modest. If you find that I have too much abused the brief and careless form of a current journal, you must consider that the manner of speech and the manner of thought are one, and that to change one would be to greatly risk hampering the other.

It is possible, if the attempt pleases you, that I shall renew it quite often elsewhere, but in a restricted circle. To this one comes some day or other. We begin with long journeys around the world, imaginary or real, then a day comes, soon or late, when the circle of our walks becomes limited like that of our ambitions and hopes. Some of us finish by making humbly and exactly the tour of their consciousness, and these last do well. E. F.

St. Martin de Ré, October, 1862.

The island is very narrow and very long. Examined on the map it is seen to extend from the southeast to the northwest. It offers to the continent the sharp point of Sablonceaux, and opposes to the high seas the enormous and redoubtable spur of rocks on which is planted the double light of the Whales. Its total length between these two points is seven leagues; its greatest width is six kilometres. Taking for a base line the thickest and most compact part, and drawing it straight from north to south, on the upper side is found the capricious and deeply indentated configuration of our southern geographical forms, — projecting points, capes, small gulfs, *culs de sac* in which the sea is strangled, where the wave insinuates and exhausts itself, where land and water are married in strange fancifulness; shoals sometimes dry and sometimes wet; a configuration which every tide modifies, and which fades away in the innumerable windings of the salt pits. These are the sole anchoring grounds of the island. First, the Pit of Loix, less vast but almost as safe as our famous harbor of Aiguillon, — which re-

ceives only the land winds; then the *Fief* or *Fier* of Ars, a sort of muddy funnel, still more sheltered, but less navigable and less accessible. The other coast is more simple; it is even entirely simple. Its inhospitable name of "the Savage Coast" comes from the fact that it affords not the slightest shelter; it faces the wind storms from the south and southwest, and receives fully the assaults of the open sea, — and what assaults they are! The terrible waves gnaw and wear it away imperceptibly, but as they find almost everywhere an equal resistance in sand, pebbles, or cliffs, as they meet no soft earth to dilute, they confine themselves to devouring, inch by inch, the hard rind of this coast of the island, and only invade it by accident.

It might be said, moreover, that the island is of very variable dimensions, changing every day in extent as well as form; for its territory is increased at low tide by another submarine territory, not less real, and almost as precious, which is taken possession of twice in the twenty-four hours.

At the curious time of *low water*, which discloses suddenly a fund of unexpected wealth and fertility, the island is not recognizable. It becomes two or three times larger than it is at high tide. The shoals are bare, the capes prolonged, the little gulfs dry; all that is not retained in swamps rolls off; the channels are choked up; the muddy bottom rises; the *Fier* of Ars is a slough; the Pit of Loix lays bare the resting ground where ships can anchor; long banks of pebbles extend from the cliffs; endless sands die away among the waves, and the dangerous pavement which surrounds

the island is indicated in the extreme distance by a disturbed line where, even when the sea is calm, is seen the foaming of breakers. The hydrographic chart published by the navy gives a very curious idea of this brief moment of sincerity during which the sea no longer makes a mystery of anything, and, as it were, acknowledges thus all the dangers and resources that it conceals. An hour after, the wave returns. The land is seen to diminish. In six hours it has returned to its natural limits, if one can call natural the limits of a country which decreases or increases according to the ebb and flow of the ocean, which is fashioned at the pleasure of the sea, and which would not exist without this going and coming. At high tide when the wave has regained its level, and borders with a firmer line the better marked outline of the island, one shudders at seeing how narrow the island is at certain points, and can no longer doubt the incessant labor of the sea to cut it in two.

Its system of military defence is very simple. It is based on the fact that wherever the coast is inaccessible, it is useless to defend it, and there are but four or five points, as history can attest, where a naval army can land. Each of these weak points having been tried in succession by an invasion, there could be no hesitation about the choice of a place. Hence, the four or five redoubts that we meet with in our journey.

The natural divisions of the country are also the work of the soil, and cannot even be modified by the indefatigable industry of the inhabitants. The calcareous zone has received the vines, the argillaceous and salt zone has been transformed into salt pits. As

to the sand which is almost everywhere mingled with the earth, the best has been made of it that was possible; and you can see, Monsieur, what has been done to utilize the absolutely unfertile parts of the downs. There are, I think, 1,500 hectares of arable earth, 4,000 hectares of vineyards, and 5,300 of swamp.

The total population of the island is, as I have told you, more than 19,000 inhabitants, which makes about 244 souls to a square kilometre, which is, in equal extent, an average triple the average stated in France. Finally, to make an end of these preliminary statements, I must say one word concerning the municipal organization, and quote the names of the localities where I shall pause.

The island is divided into two cantons, — themselves subdivided into eight parishes. The canton of St. Martin, chief town St. Martin, comprehends besides, La Flotte, Sainte Marie, and Le Bois. That of Ars has Ars for a chief town, and its dependants are La Couarde, Loix, and Les Portes, to which must be added a conglomeration of four villages, composing together a single parish, which belongs to the mayoralty of Ars.

Of these little localities, of which the most populous scarcely counts four thousand inhabitants, three alone are ports, and afford a mixed population of sea-faring, agricultural, and working men. The others, situated in the midst of the country, which is never very far from the coast, are in the midst of the best vineyards, like Sainte Marie and Le Bois, either in the heart of the swamps like the wilder parishes of Loix and Les Portes, or on the very limit of

the salt pits and the cultivated lands, like La Couarde, belonging exclusively to the land; and it is there that the real native population can be observed in the roughness and variety of its habits, at once laborers, vine-dressers, and salt-makers. They are not all equally fortunate in their situation, the favorableness of the soil, nor in the value of their productions. Thus, one parish is overflowing with wine, while another gathers with great difficulty only what is necessary for the consumption of the people in easy circumstances. One is too near the downs, and without great care would find its cultivated fields filled with sand; the other, which is too near the sea, is subject to inundations; another, on the contrary, is too far from it, which compels the owners to make long journeys for fertilizers, and necessitates more expensive means of conveyance. Here the fisheries, organized on a great scale with forty or fifty sloops, become a notable element of ease, if not of wealth; and there, for want of boats, they are reduced to an industry which brings in but little, — a sort of hazardous hunting pursued by the diggers in the mud; elsewhere, the construction of those great snares for fishes that are called seines being either interdicted or impracticable, fishing is a resource that is wholly wanting. Shells abound on certain favored coasts, and the sandy coasts are wanting in them. Finally, it is on the north of the island that the oyster beds lie, — a fruitful and quite recent business, of which the opposite shore is very jealous. Add to these first causes of inequality other unlooked-for vicissitudes which alternately strike at one or another of these industries, and change the place of pros-

perity, — the competition in salt, which in twelve years has lowered the value of the salt works by half, and the oïdium which has ravaged the vines for a number of years, and which has only been conquered by a great expenditure of care, trouble, and money, which diminishes by so much the revenue from that source. Thus, some grow rich while the others become poor. Ten years ago, public fortune was at the other end of the island; it remained there while salt sold well, and wine was worth a few centimes a litre; to-day, when the price of wine is almost five times as much, while salt has lost half its value, fortune has gone over to the side of the vine-dressers, and the salt-workers suffer.

But no one dies of hunger, I hasten to say. Comfort exists everywhere in a greater or less degree. This unequal distribution of the natural resources of the island is so perfectly compensated for; there is such a fitness in the division of good and evil, such advantages to draw from the sea when the soil is lacking, such profits on the contrary to win from the soil when it is the sea which is miserly; the exchange between all parts of the island of whatever any possess in excess is rendered so obligatory by common necessity; in a word, compensations are so distributed that between the richest and poorest there is often only an accidental difference. Moreover, irremediable needs are supplied by powerful efforts of patience, courage, and sobriety; even total indigence would be endured, I believe, by fasting. It is good to come here to learn to what point the sordid love of money can be combined with heroic scorn of material comfort, and by what an inconceivable economy of needs one succeeds in suppressing poverty.

St. Martin is the capital of the island, for no little country lacks one of its own. It is first perceived in the twelfth century with the ducal dynasty of the Mauléons. That of the dukes of Aquitaine was extinct. Four hundred years before, the chief of this warlike family, the father of Unald, the grandfather of Waifre, and the father-in-law of a Saracen Emir; the enemy, then the auxiliary of Charles Martel, a hero in spite of himself on the bloody day of Poitiers; this chief, I say, a many-sided personage, such as is often encountered in the Middle Ages, had built his castle near Port Notre Dame, chosen the island for his residence, then converted his castle into a monastery, and finally had himself buried there (about 735) with that famous copper crown with points of precious stones, discovered just a thousand years later (in 1730), and deposited to-day, (fancy where), in one of the halls of the Louvre, in the Museum of Sovereigns. If we go still farther back, — and I think this is not worth while when there is nothing new to be determined, — an earlier monastery is suspected, founded in the Isle of Loix by Unamand, then bishop of Maëstricht, who died in the monastery of Elnon, near Tournay (679), and was canonized under the name of St. Amand. In the sixth century, there is a report of a leprosy hospital established near the place where St. Marie rises to-day, and perhaps in a field which still bears the name of the Home of the Sick (Maladrerie). In the fifth, the only history is the gallant and tragic anecdote of the cook of Caribert, and sole geographical document the "Tracina" of Gregory of Tours. Finally, in the second, history is silent, and geography is confined to the "Promontorium Santoreum"

of Ptolemy. Now this "Promontorium Santoreum" is one of those great historical cases, less important than that of Alesia, but almost as long contested, which modern erudition has not yet exhausted. As to the Normans, from whom the Isle of Ré received a visit in the ninth century, to cite the pillage of the monastery of Eudes and the destruction of La Maladrerie is to recall one of the thousand fantasies of those frightful robbers, true sea-wolves, who came to us, brought by the northern tide, on benches, and like voracious fishes, rushed into the entrances of our rivers, slipped along our coast and made the venerable Charlemagne weep.

In the twelfth century light is fully thrown upon history, at least upon that elementary history that every well-instructed collegian is presumed to know. The unpolitic susceptibility of a husband, too much a husband for a sovereign, delivers a corner of France to the Plantagenets, and the Isle of Ré is thrown into the bargain. The island becomes English. Eble de Mauléon founded near La Flotte the monastic abbey of St. Lawrence, and the Châteliers, which was partly burned by the English about 1462, and destroyed in the sixteenth century by the Protestants. Another Mauléon had just been born — Savary, son of Raoul and Aliette de Ré; this last, the most illustrious of all, indeed the only illustrious one, who, if he did not steal his glory, has so singularly mingled in it light and shade, victories, combats, and false oaths, transactions of renown and villanies, that in spite of his biographers we do not know whether we have to deal with a very great or a very vile man; in any case a most extraordinary person, a drover and a poet, an intrepid fighter,

of incredibly variable humor, sometimes belonging to one, sometimes to another; useful to all, serving them one moment, only to betray them, and only betraying them for the purpose of selling himself more dearly; chivalric through it all, prince and money coiner, cherished by his terrible and too indulgent friend, John Lackland, caressed by the Pope, a crusader from fancy; then, towards the end of his life, becoming again a freebooter; finally dying no one knows where; for some say in England, and others make him die at the village of Plois on the island, and suppose the ashes of this stirring man are at rest under the pavement of St. Lawrence, in the abbey founded by his grandsire, two paces from the sea which had so long tossed him about. Two or three reigns passed during the course of this romantic life. We are now in 1234. Philip Augustus is dead; John Lackland, dead. Ten years have passed since the grandson of Louis VII. retook Guyenne from the grandson of Henry II. The island, alienated for seventy-two years, is now in the possession of France. How long will it remain so? It is hardly at the beginning of those perpetual changes from hand to hand which are to last from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. The Peace of Brittany gives it to England. Thirteen years later, it returns to France. England sets her foot upon it once more in ——; she disembarks there in 1462 (burning of the abbey of Mauléon). To whom then does it belong? Is it English or French? The sixteenth century comes, and the same question is reproduced in another form, but not less doubtful. The contest no longer is between crown and crown as before, about an insig-

nificant apanage, in view of a suzerainty more nominal than real. The competitors have changed their names; their aim is different; the object of the competition is the same. The struggle begins on the morrow of St. Bartholomew, with the first events of which La Rochelle is the theatre. From 1574 to 1627, from the first siege of La Rochelle to the second, from the Duke of Anjou to Louis XIII, the Isle of Ré has not one day of rest except two short armistices, one after the edict of Poitiers and the other after the edict of Nantes. Much less Protestant still than La Rochelle, perhaps quite neutral, if the parties who are disputing for it will let it live in peace, it becomes in turn what it is made by others, letting itself be invaded by the strongest, and giving itself to whomsoever takes it. The question is, who will keep it, whether it will be Protestant or Catholic, insurgent or royalist, whether it will belong to Lanoue' or to the gentlemen of Rouhaut de Landreau; whether it shall be the property of Soubise or St. Luc, Buckingham or Toyras, La Rochelle or the Cardinal. Toyras, besieged in the citadel of St. Martin, defends himself there from July to November (1627), three months and six days. "The brave Toyras," says the historian of the "Oratory of La Rochelle," "to whom everything was lacking except intrepidity and a noble despair." The general assault was ordered on the night of November 6, and repulsed; on the 7th Schomberg disembarked at the point of Chauveau. The siege was raised. Buckingham fought near La Davière. After fifty-four years of undecisive struggles, the question as to whom the island should belong was settled on that day. The island was the King's.

A very exact and rapid idea of the last episodes of this disturbed period can be obtained from a contemporary document, as authentic as a page of history, as expressive as a picture — I mean Callot's engraved plate, *Taking of the Ile de Ré and Revictualling of the Citadel*. . . .

END OF FRAGMENT.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

UN MOT SUR L'ART CONTEMPORAIN.

NE croyez pas au moins que mon zèle idolâtre,
Mon ami, soit pareil à l'écolier folâtre,
Qui sème étourdiment des fleurs sur son chemin ;
Ne croyez pas qu'il aille, un encensoir en main,
Servile adorateur, courbé comme un roi mage,
Couronnant tour à tour et brisant une image,
Invoquer chaque idole, à chaque autel porter
Un tribut journalier d'honneurs, puis déserter
Idole, autel et temple ; et que, de caste en caste,
Prostituant mon culte aveugle, iconoclaste,
Je coure, agenouillant ma pensée en tous lieux,
Brûler un peu d'encens jusqu'aux pieds des faux dieux.
Ma foi naïve est morte à cette heure ; et, plus sage,
J'ai fait à ses dépens mon docte apprentissage.
Croyez-moi : cet encens, je sais bien ce qu'il vaut.
Quand j'en offre aujourd'hui l'hommage au Dieu nouveau,
Je mesure avec soin mon offrande et j'évite
D'en parfumer trop tôt l'encensoir du lévite.

Je courais, quand j'étais plus enfant, au travers
D'une strophe ou d'une ode après un de ces vers

Où l'œil qu'il éblouit, à son insu s'arrête
Sur certains mots taillés en bosse, à vive arête.
J'aimais surtout à voir, dans ses royaux habits,
Les vers d'Hugo chausser son cothurne en rubis;
Tantôt, comme un pacha tout enbaumé de myrrhe,
Agrafer sur sa tempe un soyeux cachemire;
Ou, comme une Italienne, en son rapide essor,
Sous ses doigts égrenant des colliers tissus d'or,
Se cadencer, bondir au son des tarentelles,
Sur sa gorge éclatante agiter ses dentelles,
Ses chapelets de perle et de sequins tressés.
Le rythme étincelait; la strophe à mots pressés
Chantait comme un clavier sonore à mon oreille,
Expirait en point d'orgue ou décroissait, pareille
A je ne sais quel timbre harmonique où les vers
Tintaient l'un contre l'autre avec un son divers.
Ailleurs, sa voix plus grave entonnait sans roulade
Un lai mélancolique, un refrain de ballade,
Et c'était un pas d'arme en champ clos, dans les bois
Le cor qui ralliait une meute aux abois;
Les ponts-levis sonnaient sous les pas des cavales;
Un Margrave y passait au galop; les timbales
A toute heure éveillaient les échos des manoirs;
Puis, parfois dans l'orage, au fond des vallons noirs,
C'était, près d'un bûcher gris et réduit en poudre,
Satan qui ricanait en regardant la foudre.
Et, quand à petit bruit, alors, son vers volait
Du vol insaisissable et bleu d'un feu follet,
Ce vers inanimé me donnait peur à lire.
Enfin la moindre note, en passant par sa lyre,
Animait sur la mienne un sympathique accent;
J'attachais à ses pas mon vers adolescent;

J'avais, afin de mieux exhausser mon idole
Dans mon cœur de vingt ans, bâti son capitole.
— Malheur à qui bâtit sur un cœur de vingt ans
Sans donner plus d'assise à ses instants flottants !
En cherchant son niveau, le sol mouvant et libre
S'écroule et mon idole a perdu l'équilibre.

Or, savez-vous laquelle, en moi, détrône Hugo ?
Quelle harpe y suscite un plus profond écho ?
Savez-vous quel poète à la puissante haleine
Épanchant dans nos seins son urne toujours pleine
Fait jusqu'à nous descendre et jusqu'aux cieux monter
Sa voix ; nous donne à tous un cœur pour l'écouter ;
Et, mêlant sur son luth, avec le vent qui tonne
Dans les rameaux épais, le sanglot monotone
Du flux qui se fatigue à battre un continent,
Un bruit d'aile au milieu des herbes bourdonnant ;
La barque qui fend l'onde avec un choc d'antennes,
L'eau qui pleure en tombant au bassin des fontaines,
Les bruits des monts, les voix du ciel, les cris du cœur . . .
Les a tous accordés pour en faire un seul chœur ?
— Chantre orphique, éternel, dont la voix nous captive,
C'est lui qui jour et nuit tient notre âme attentive
Lui qui fait, sous ses doigts, sans mesurer les vers,
Comme un orgue divin, palpiter l'univers.
La Nature ! oh ! voilà le seul et le grand maître !
Diapason auquel il faut monter son mètre ;
Caucase universel où chaque siècle alla
Diviniser son œuvre ; et l'urne est toujours là ;
Et toujours l'homme et Dieu sur la source écumante
Sont penchés ; l'un y puise et l'autre l'alimente.

Autrefois j'avais cru, malgré mon vague instinct,
Que la nature et l'homme avaient un chant distinct ;
Et qu'entre nos désirs et l'infini visible,
Dieu, comme un steppe aride, avait mis l'impossible.
— J'avais vu l'art un jour se tailler un manteau
Dans la pourpre de Tyr ; j'avais vu son manteau
Sur un socle d'albâtre, Hellénique ou Romaine,
Sur le bloc indien, sculpter la forme humaine.
En d'autres lieux, j'avais vu la famille, un soir,
Sous l'Atrium étrusque, essayer de s'asseoir,
J'avais vu Spartacus jeter, superbe et libre,
Ses fers, pendant mille ans rongés, aux flots du Tibre
Et l'homme enorgueilli de s'être affranchi seul,
— Faisant de l'orbe éteint du pôle un froid linceul,
Sans penser que la terre, autour de lui vivante,
Participait au même esprit, — sans épouvante
Couronnant de rayons un simulacre vain,
Calquer sur un fond d'or son front presque divin.
— Mais depuis, j'ai compris qu'entre ce monde et l'autre
L'art humain doit servir d'interprète et d'apôtre ;
Que si Dieu nous transmet un souffle intelligent,
S'il attache à la lyre une corde d'argent,
C'est pour que l'homme alors recueille, unisse, explique,
Comme a fait Pythagore en son hymne algébrique,
Les sons disséminés de l'orchestre infini.

Et de nos jours enfin, mon ami, j'ai béni
Notre siècle d'avoir inauguré le culte
Du vrai Dieu. — Soit qu'on chante, ou qu'on peigne ou qu'on sculpte,
L'homme aujourd'hui chemine au niveau des sentiers,
Sans écraser l'insecte ou l'herbe sous ses pieds.
Derrière, un pan d'azur l'éclaire et le domine ;

Rien ne manque au tableau : ni l'or d'une étamine,
Ni la fourmi qui nage au bord d'un jonc flottant,
Ni la grenouille assise aux marges d'un étang.
Voilà pourquoi je cherche avant tout sur les toiles
Si le peintre a pris soin d'y semer des étoiles,
D'y dessiner là-bas tel ou tel horizon
De plaine ou de coteau, d'y marquer la saison ;
Et si l'on peut y voir, sans que notre œil hésite,
Quels sont l'heure du jour, et la zone, et le site ;
Si ce toit enfoui parmi les blés en fleurs
Est un toit du Berry, de la Beauce ou d'ailleurs.
Voilà — vous l'avouerai-je aussi ? — pourquoi j'adore
Ce paysage ombreux qu'à peine un rayon dore,
Où Karel aime à peindre un chardon, un épi,
Un âne en paix broutant près d'un pâtre assoupi ;
— Ou bien ce gué limpide où Berghem a fait boire
Ses chevreaux tachetés de laine blanche et noire,
Ce chien qui les escorte et ces troncs de bouleau
Mirant leur métallique écorce au fond de l'eau.
— Voilà pourquoi jamais je ne me lasse à lire
La page où le crayon du peintre aimé d'Elvire
Laissa tomber son rêve ; et, tantôt, déploya
Sa voile antique au golfe de Baïa ;
Tantôt nous dessina son lac ou l'ermitage
Dont le coteau natal abritait l'humble étage,
Ses chalets, son nid d'aigle et son glacier croulant ;
Là-bas un roc alpestre avec un manteau blanc ;
Puis à mi-côte enfin, abrité par un cône,
Le toit — presque en entier couvert de pampre jaune —
Où Jocelyn habite et rêve avec douceur
A Laurence, à sa chèvre, à sa mère, à sa sœur.
— Voyez : plus doux que l'onde ou qu'un vol de colombe,

Son vers à souffle égal s'enfle, s'élève et tombe.
Par moments, on dirait la grande urne d'airain
D'où s'échappe à pleins bords l'eau du Gange ou du Rhin ;
Et tout s'y réfléchit, s'y répète, s'y mêle ;
Le ciel y mire à nu son bleu sombre comme elle,
— Le charme est inouï ! — pas un bruit, pas un choc,
Pas un flot discordant qui hurle au pied d'un roc,
Jamais un vent plus fort n'y souffle la tourmente ;
La vague après la vague en fuyant se lamente ;
Dans la brume, on s'y laisse emporter loin du port ;
Son roulis musical à la fin vous endort . . .
Et quand après une heure on aborde à la grève,
Longtemps l'esprit chancelle enivré par son rêve.
— Pourtant, si beau qu'il soit, j'aime, oh ! j'aime encor mieux
Voguer sur un vrai fleuve ; — aller, suivant des yeux
Le rayon que Dieu même y jette aux plis des vagues ;
Écoutant, dilatant mon âme aux rumeurs vagues
De l'aube et du couchant, des Étés, des Hivers
Et, — le dirai-je enfin ? — j'offrirais tous les vers
Pour entendre ce soir, au loin, un rouge-gorge
Se plaindre, — ou les grillons chanter dans les champs d'orge.

EUGÈNE FROMENTIN.

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